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Intermedial Poetics: Alternative Methods and Practices

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Introduction: Towards an Alternative Poetics of Intermediality

BOWEN WANG & AMELIA MCCONVILLE

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an intermedial dialogue between verbal, visual, and vocal representations, alongside the radical and contemporary avant-garde art movements. What sets avant-gardism apart from traditional representationalism are its distinct attributes of revitalising the ‘collective dimension of explorative creativity’ and employing ‘[inter]artistic activity as the means for opening up new territory’ (Sers and Eburne 849). Grounded in these principles of formal innovation and generic transgression, both literary and artistic historiography reveals a notable departure from the classical tenet of Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* towards the notion of intermediality – a confluence rather than the ‘ancient parallel’ (MacLeod 194), particularly evident in the early modernist experimentation of Imagism and Vorticism. Ezra Pound’s ideogram, Wyndham Lewis’s vortex, William Carlos Williams’s ekphrasis, Elizabeth Bishop’s perspectivism, and Gertrude Stein’s portraiture, all share an inspiration drawn from the material and technical innovations of modern art and mass media. Through a continuous and inventive interchange between various artforms and mediums, ranging from painting, architecture, photography, texture, novel, musical, theatre, and cinema, modern and contemporary writers opt to reconstruct their textual works by adopting a non-representational technique or style, discarding the naturalistic principles of mimicry in favour of new modes of expression.

In this shift towards an intermedial collaboration between poetic and non-poetic forms, the contemporary world itself has undergone a profound medial transformation, from what Walter Benjamin refers to as ‘mechanical reproducibility’ to later Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘hyperreality’ over the course of the entire twentieth century.¹ As a main break with traditions of representational art and narrative linearity, early modernism has opened up new possibilities for the aesthetics of intermediality. As Matei Calinescu claims in his *Five Faces of Modernity*, genuine modernism is ‘not *historically* but only *aesthetically* forward’ (84) and its anti-traditionalism and worship of novelty relinquishes the faith in linear progression of history or in chronologically-ordered time. Embracing spatial expansion and intensification as an autonomous experiment, modernists and postmodernists seek to create a new spatial-temporal reality by discontinuing the conventional materials and appealing to a synaesthetic experience at the interface ‘travelling’ among word, sound, and image based on the ‘interdisciplinary mobility’ (Bal 29). After this period, more and more artists begin to closely scrutinise the intersection between different artistic mediums, transcending the historical boundaries of highbrow and lowbrow arts and their ‘dichotomous cultural paradigm’ (O’Sullivan 283), whether it be in the context of a Baroque painting or computer-mediated imagery. This intermedial exploration thus challenges the validity and authority of old disciplinary frames, giving rise to a desire for an inclusive, ever-expanding, and heterogenous poetics beyond purely textual or literal criticism. The prism of poetic intermediality, in this vein, warrants greater attention in academic research and encourages more engagement with novel interpretations and conceptualisations.

W. J. T. Mitchell identifies these momentous changes as a 'pictorial turn,' which is a 'postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality' (*Picture Theory* 16).² This pictorial or visual turn represents a significant deviation from the linguistic turn termed by Richard Rorty, a previous change that is distinguished by the influence of French Structuralism in the history of Western philosophy. Mitchell's 'picture' now assumes a dominant position, supplanting earlier epistemological focuses on the 'thing' in ancient and medieval philosophy, the 'idea' during the Enlightenment, and Ferdinand de Saussure's emphasis on the 'word' (Rorty 257–311). Structuralists posit that the world is ontologically grounded on a structural system of language, but their assumption may no longer be unassailable. Contrarily, scholars like Nelson Goodman, with his language of art, and Ernest Gombrich, who works on pictorial psychology, argue for a 'conventionalist' (Wang, 'Demystification' 81) perspective of representation. They contend that even non-linguistic symbols can be regarded as codes operating within a conventional system, whether based on pre-existing sociocultural constructs or rooted in transcendent human knowledge.³ This representational conventionalism effectively dismantles the longstanding boundary between text and image that has been central to the intellectual tradition since Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave.'

The idea of intermediality between the linguistic and the non-linguistic finds its theoretical alignment within the realm of poststructuralism.⁴ Roland Barthes, for instance, introduces a semiotic approach to deciphering not just literary works but also paintings, photographs, musical compositions, comics, and films, viewing them all as off-centred 'texts' or 'sign systems' devoid of a definitive closure. Michael Foucault examines the 'infinite relationship' between poetry and painting, shedding light on the inherent tension between the discursive and the visible. Julia Kristeva's notion of 'intertextuality' synthesises semiology with dialogism to interpret poetic language both symbolically (literally) and semiotically (pictorially). Jacques Derrida's coinage of '*différance*' disrupts the hierarchical divide between the verbal and the visual by questioning the predominance of phonologism/logocentrism; he prioritises the trace of the signifier over the signified, the sound-image than the meaningful discourse in a deconstructive effect of 'dissemination.' In addition, Donna Haraway's 'cyborg' and Homi Bhabha's 'hybridity' resonate with the radically composite artistry that merges word and image, as exemplified in works such as William Blake's relief-etchings and E. E. Cummings' 'poempictures.'

The intermedial or interartistic condition, from the antiquity to the contemporary, prompts us to further investigate what Mitchell terms as the 'image/text problematic' (*Picture Theory* 7) through a series of dramatic alternations in representation and creation. As early as the classical era, Horace, influenced by the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos' aphorism that 'painting is silent poetry and poetry is speaking painting' (Rogers 41), composed the renowned axiom of *ut pictura poesis*, which emphasises the sisterly affinity of poetic and pictorial arts.⁵ Centuries later, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *Laocoon*, contested this Horatian viewpoint and asserted that the 'succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist' (100). He insisted on a dualist understanding that separates these two artistic mediums and their embodied domains, reflecting his monomodal departmentalisation of artforms. Nonetheless, this binary division between poetry and painting has become obsolete, as the medial boundaries have been eroded by the interart influences and exchanges active since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its emergence of cross-medial poetics has played a pivotal role in dissolving the lines between these traditionally distinct models of art.

Instead of adhering to the laocoonised point of view that disconnects the literary and the non-literary, the innovative approach of intermediality offers a valuable framework for exploring the dynamic and productive interplay between diverse artforms and mediums. This intermedial perspective can be better understood by using phrases like 'cross-fertilization' (Landwehr 1) between poetry and painting or "infinite relation" (Shapiro 13) between saying and seeing, deeming them as 'kindred muses' (Moramarco 68) or a pair of sister arts, recognising the 'crossover' (Nadanner 32) of

interartistic knowledge, and realising their ‘mutual illumination’ (Wagner 2). Besides, Mitchell’s conception of ‘imagetext’ (*Image Science* 39) denotes the interdependent relationship and the composite form or idea transcends both mediums.⁶ Compared to conventional means that focus on the ‘sisterhood’ of *poesis* and *pictura*, dealing with their translatability and correspondence, intermediality encourages us to capture the ‘media interrelations’ (Elleström 2) that transgress old boundaries within a broader universe. In this expanded realm, artists can fully engage in the intermedial transfer of one medium into another.

As reformulated in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, the essence of intermediality does ‘not lie in a simple combination of preexisting formulations but works as a more flexible, dynamic, and dialectical process in-between historically paralleled or separated domains’:

Intermediality, on a dialectical and dialogical basis, does not assume an actual juxtaposition of literary pictorialism or pictorial literariness, charging its partner with unspeakable or invisible deficiencies of dissonance; it instead brings mediating and communicating into specific focus, which encodes the collaboration between poets and painters within their lines on the page and the canvas with reciprocities, tensions, and iconoclastic powers of aesthetic modernity. (Wang, ‘Reformulating’ 361)

Applying Bakhtinian keyword of dialogue between characters in a fiction to the ‘mutual interference’ (Caws 4) between two medial presences, verbal and non-verbal, this energetic ‘mediating and communicating’ of intermediality goes deeper than previously expected. It involves not only a poem and a non-verbal art, but also the poet and the artist, their respective artistic schools and movements, and cultural backgrounds and social values. The simultaneous combination of reading and spectatorship creates a more comprehensive, fluid, and reciprocal conversation. Its destruction of the fixed frame of subjects can be seen as a ‘meeting ground and battle ground’ (Wagner 36), as it provides an interactive space for experimenting with the ‘verbal-visual-sonic complex’ (Perloff 18) to search for creative and interpretative contingencies. The reader-viewer is substantially stimulated to choose new ways of reception and interpretation within this framework, fostering a rich and ever-evolving interaction among different disciplines, cultures, and mediums.

Inspired by the poetics of intermediality, which attempts to reorient modern thought by bridging the gap between the discursive and the visible, there is a growing need for more focused research and studies in intermedial reading, as defined by Mitchell as a ‘magisterial “theory of Imagery”’ or ‘Iconology’ (*Iconology* ix) studying on logos, icons, and other medial elements. This applied criticism shall extend what Liliane Louvel calls a ‘pictorial third’ (2) to a ‘medial third’ paying careful attention to the pragmatics of interartistic connections across the textual, plastic, and auditory borderlines. This special issue, titled ‘Intermedial Poetics: Alternative Methods and Practices,’ aims to critically dissect how this intermedial collaboration of poetry and non-poetry responds to the ongoing debate between literature and art. It also probes into how this engagement with visual culture and mass media moves beyond the structural differences within separated dualism, contributing to an alternative model for communication that is an inseparable part of modern and contemporary aesthetics.

From ‘iconic projection’ to ‘medial projection’ (Bruhn 28), intermedial poetics may cover specific generic crossovers in a highly refashionable manner, such as cinepoetics, ekphrasis, digital poetry, concrete poetry, sound poetry, city lyrics, intersemiotic translation, verbal-visual portraiture, the poetic-architectonic, textural practices, visual poetics, and textual theatricality, as elaborately discussed in this special issue. Beyond mere multimedial influence or artistic effects, the collection of papers here intends to offer a more broadened, transformative perspective by casting lights on aspects like spectatorship, aesthetic form as an altered identity, and interdisciplinary considerations of contemporary art practices. In general, this special issue tries to address several key research questions: *au fond*, what sets traditional textual or literalist poetics apart from the poetics of intermediality? How does the latter function and perform within distinct artforms or mediums? Furthermore, how does intermediality serve as an actual agency designed to facilitate conversations crossing different domains, whether they are aesthetic, technological, or ideological in nature?

The selection of papers for this issue features a wide range of influences and perspectives, spanning different historical periods, and engaging with many of the aforementioned approaches to literature, art, and beyond. In their paper ‘Guy Gilles or the Cinepoetics of Presence,’ Hugues Azérad and Marion Schmid engage with the intermedial nature of poetic cinema through their study of French filmmaker Guy Gilles, using the lens of Yves Bonnefoy’s theoretical texts to establish Gilles’ ‘cinepoetics of presence.’ This paper demonstrates the transfer between aesthetic categories such as ‘poetic’ are not confined to the medium of literature: cinema specifically can create a porous space for poetry and cinema to flourish in the interstices between categories that also facilitates a fusion of artwork and audience. Continuing on in this vein, Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl’s paper ‘Intermedial Poetics in Contemporary Anglophone Novels: Re-Negotiating Western Visual Archives’ places the references to images evident in verbal–visual configurations of postcolonial and transcultural artists and authors as the manifestation of the racially politicised ‘right to see,’ situated within the wider pictorial turn. They argue that many postcolonial, transcultural fictions utilise intermedial relations to critically engage with established visual archives and their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, crucially positing the potential for this as an index of – and precondition for – change.

In addition, Emma Tornborg’s paper ‘Ekphrasis as Intra-action: Re-reading “Photograph from September 11” by Wislawa Szymborska’ engages anew with the ekphrastic nature of this ‘poem about a photograph’, excavating the spatiotemporal properties of the different media types utilised to renegotiate the relationship between subject and object. Jarkko Toikkanen presents ‘Vanishing Intermedialities in Wallace Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West”,’ which offers a complementary alternative reading of Wallace Stevens’ poem by appealing to the medium-specific elements of the vanishing intermedialities that impact the reader-viewer. This strategy is proposed as a different manner of approaching textual analysis, one which takes into consideration more fundamentally the concepts of design and agency, and ultimately demonstrates how the sensory palate of this poem expands past sight and hearing alone.

Noticeably, Lars Elleström’s presence looms large in several papers: Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen’s paper ‘Disjunctive Pronouns: On Multimodal Analysis of Digital Poetry’ tackles the instability of boundaries through Elleström’s conceptual framework of multimodality and mixed modalities, providing an analysis of a selection of digital poetry and how its various modal compositions can illuminate meaning formation within this paradigm through ‘non-trivial’ means. In addition, Signe Kjaer Jensen’s paper ‘The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and “Let It Go”’ addresses the inherently intermedial format of song and animated musical film as ‘integrated’ media using Elleström’s framework, presenting her reading of synchronic intermediality and its impact on meaning potential within her chosen musical, *Frozen*.

The other papers in this special issue deal with poetic intermediality across a variety of mediums and time periods, from early Romanticism to contemporary concrete poetry: in ‘Perceiving Intermedial Romanticism: “The Eye sees more than the heart knows” & “the despotism of the eye”,’ Serena Qihui Pei presents the intermediality inherent in overlapping yet distinct interplay between plastic arts and poetic visions in the Romantic poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth respectively, while through the paper ‘In Flux: Actor–Network Theory, Concrete Poetry, and Critical Making,’ Kelsey Dufresne uses Actor–Network Theory (ANT) to encourage a critical analysis encompassing the broader relationships evident in the visual configurations of concrete poems, specifically through designing and constructing video representations of poetic elements and networks. This indicates the strong future potential of interactive opportunities for engagement with the wider networks of association connected with and to a poem that broadens the parameters of traditional literary analysis.

Marc Matter’s paper ‘From Repetitive Structures to Loops in Contemporary Sound Poetry’ invokes concepts of repetition in relation to loops in sound poetry, discussing how the compositional use of media–technologies can influence the aesthetics of sound poetry and the subsequent excava-

tion of meaning. Sibyl Gallus-Price places the poetry of Susan Howe in conversation with modernist painting in order to challenge the 'painterly' aspects of Howe's poetic work in the paper 'Susan Howe's *That This: Art at the Limits of the Canvas and the Page*.' It revisits the traditional interpretations of Howe's experimentation with boundaries and borders to extend the commentary on her innovative approaches to liminality. In 'The Fall of Icarus (through Mediums): Intersemiotic Translation from Painting to Poetry,' Swagata Chakraborty re-reads the classic ekphrastic links between Pieter Bruegel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and William Carlos' poem 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' through an intersemiotic conceptual lens, in order to explore the extent of the textual networks inherent within the ekphrasis, and its capacity to reflect the incompleteness of translation.

Moreover, in 'City Lyrics in a "Sensible Age": Intermediality and Intersensoriality in Oscar Wilde's 'Impression Du Matin' (1881) and "Symphony in Yellow" (1889),' Eszter Gyorgy invites us to consider cross-fertilization, synaesthetic sensibilities, and transformative intertextuality between different artforms in an examination of two of Oscar Wilde's 'city lyrics.' This thus presents a fresh reading of the Wildean dandy situated within the urban metropolis by appealing to the choreographics of looking, voyeurism, and an appreciation for both the material and aesthetic components of urbanity. Natalia Morzhenkova focuses on the intermedial flexibility of the poetics of literary and pictorial portraits as a cross-media process in the paper 'Modernist Verbal and Visual Portraiture: The Artistic Construction of the Portrait's Subject,' which explores identity construction and erosion with respect to the dialectic between word and image in the works of the early twentieth century's most significant artists.

Tara Brusselaers' contribution – 'Breaking the Mould: Multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*' – deals with the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in postcolonial, de-colonial, and transnational historical contexts of these works. The focus here is on the use of non-lyric modes in both texts: specifically in how these uses relate to notions of authority and silence from the perspectives of their young, Black, queer authors. Anna Lynn's paper 'Textural Aesthetics in the Avant-garde Art Practice of Nilima Sheikh and Rajyashri Goody' explores the development of a personal locus for formulating loss in the intermedial exchange between her two chosen artists, with a focus on emotional affect and its evocative implications for feminist methods of 'doing' and its politics.

Apart from these intermedial collaborations between poetic and plastic arts, Huayu Yang's paper 'Writing the Stage: Intermediality, Textual Theatricality, and *Hag-Seed* as a Theatre-Fiction' explores how the dramaturgical framework employed by Margaret Atwood creates an embodied, lively, and intermedial reading experience for readers of the text. This paper addresses how the intermedial poetics of textual theatricality enacts the readers' embodied perception of theatrical liveness and explores the porous mediality of both novel and theatre. Besides, architecture as a medium for intertextuality also features: R. B. Schwartz fuses modernist architecture with a study of poetic content in 'Poetic-Architectonic Realizations: Louis Kahn and Fumihiko Maki' where an examination of each architect's built environments is posited as revealing linguistic and poetic elements, which evinces through subtle intermediality the development of meaning.

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Notes

- ¹ See more in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings et al., translated by Edmund Jephcott et al. (Harvard UP, 2008); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (U of Michigan P, 1995).
- ² Werner Wolf also points out a ‘visual turn’ (256) as an intermedial phenomena in the last century, see Wolf, ‘Intermediality,’ in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al. (Routledge, 2005), pp. 252–56.
- ³ For more on the idea that all representation is conventional, see Goodman, *Language of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Hackett Pub. Co., 1976); Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Phaidon P, 1987).
- ⁴ Most of these theoretical readings are from *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al. (W. W. Norton, 2010): Barthes, ‘From Work to Text,’ pp. 1326–31; Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 2067–81; Derrida, *Of Grammatology and Dissemination*, pp. 1680–734; Haraway, ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,’ pp. 2187–220. Besides, see Foucault, ‘Las Meninas,’ in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 3–18; Bhabha, ‘Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Natio,’ in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 199–244.
- ⁵ On the archaeology of word (poetry) and image (painting), see Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (W. W. Norton, 1967); Henryk Markiewicz and Uliana Gabara, ‘Ut pictura poesis... A History of the Topos and the Problem,’ *On Poetry*, special issue of *New Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1987, pp. 535–58.
- ⁶ For more writings on this critical term ‘image-text,’ see W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Word and Image,’ in *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff (U of Chicago P, 1996), pp. 51–61.

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- . 'Reformulating the Theory of Literary Intermediality: A Genealogy from *Ut Pictura Poesis* to Poststructuralist In-Betweenness.' *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, edited by Jørgen Bruhn et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 339-64.

Guy Gilles or the Cinepoetics of Presence

HUGUES AZÉRAD & MARION SCHMID

Abstract: If the relations between cinema and poetry have been well explored by critics and artists since the advent of the avant-garde of the 1920s, evincing multiple affinities in terms of techniques and aesthetic objectives, the intermedial nature of poetic cinema remains less well defined. This article aims to address this omission by focusing on the ‘secret child of the New Wave’, the French filmmaker Guy Gilles (1938–1996), whose intermedial work is only now being rediscovered. Guy Gilles’s film *Au pan coupé* (*Wall Engravings*, 1967) in particular instantiates a complex interweaving of poetry and cinema, as much in its form as in its content. Gilles’s poetic film calls for a closer analysis of how both media are entangled, reaching a state of photogenic intensity (Jean Epstein) that evades narrativity and denies conceptual categories, ushering in what the authors, drawing on Yves Bonnefoy’s theoretical texts, call Gilles’s cinepoetics of presence.

Keywords: poetic cinema, intermediality, presence, Guy Gilles, Yves Bonnefoy

Poetry is what affords the world the face of its presence.

Yves Bonnefoy¹

To what extent can media other than literature become vehicles for poetry, and what does it mean for a film to be considered ‘poetic’? Ever since the first French avant-garde of the 1920s, filmmakers, theorists and critics – many of whom, like Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein, occupying several of these positions – have thought about the interconnections between cinema and poetry as part of a broader reflection on the specificity and expressive means of the new medium film (Wall-Romana 2013b). Highlighting cinema’s ‘ability to juxtapose, within several seconds, on the same luminous screen, images which are generally isolated in time or space’, critic Emile Vuillermoz enthused: ‘all this could permit a poet to realize their most ambitious dreams’ (Vuillermoz 1988 [1916], 131). Upending traditional definitions of poetry as a verbal art, Jean Epstein, together with Abel Gance one of the pioneers of poetic cinema, asserted: ‘The cinema is poetry’s most powerful medium, the truest medium for the untrue, the unreal, the “surreal” as Apollinaire would have said’ (Epstein 1988 [1924], 318). Along with painting and music, poetry became an important source of inspiration and model for the avant-garde’s quest for a ‘purer’ form of cinema, less driven by the demands of realism and narrative action, and more attuned to formal experiments and stylistic innovation. Some forty years later, the poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini similarly insisted on the subversion of traditional narrative conventions in what he termed a ‘cinema of poetry’: ‘for the most part, the films of the cinema of poetry are not made according to the ordinary rules and conventions of the screenplay, they don’t obey the usual narrative rhythms. On the contrary, disproportion is the rule, details are greatly dilated, and points traditionally considered important are very quickly recounted’ (Pasolini 1965).² Whereas the first avant-garde privileged montage as a tool of poetic expression, Pasolini, on the other hand designated ‘free indirect

point of view' – the filmmaker's exploration of characters' inner worlds and mental states – as the main feature of a cinema of poetry (Sitney 2015, 7). Poetic cinema, then, seems to be first and foremost defined by its shift from action and plot to the exploration of subjective states such as dreams or memories, its puncturing of traditional notions of time and space, as well as the heightened form of perception and greater attention to detail that it affords spectators.³ Just as, in the words of Alain Badiou, 'poetry is an arrest upon language, an effect of the coded artifice of linguistic manipulation' (Badiou 2013, 91), so the poetic in cinema divests the medium of its merely dramatic character, opening it up to a deeper experience of viewing and sensing.

But what forms and figures does the poetic take in cinema? How does a language associated with literary writing find expression in the filmic medium? And what hybrid forms in-between the verbal and the visual emerge in a cinema of poetry? In this article, we will focus on French director Guy Gilles (1938–1996), a marginalised filmmaker who is slowly gaining in recognition in France and beyond (Forret 2022a, Schmid 2019, Lépingle and Uzal 2014), as a particularly original practitioner of poetic cinema. Born in Algiers, Gilles made his first short, *Soleil éteint* in 1958, before moving to Paris two years later, in the midst of the Algerian War. Though aesthetically innovative and highly prolific – he directed eight features, more than a dozen shorts and some forty works for television, including essay films on Marcel Proust and Jean Genet – he remained in the shadows of French New Wave and Post-New Wave cinema, his melancholy, uncompromisingly personal films failing to resonate with contemporary audiences. Trained at the School of Fine Arts, Gilles's creative practice was above all influenced by poetry and painting: 'I make films as one writes verse, as one uses paintbrushes', he declares in a 1968 interview (Lépingle and Uzal 2014, 48). The art of poetry is evoked in film titles such as *Le Clair de terre* (*Earth Light*, 1970), named after André Breton's 1923 poetry collection; *Au biseau des baisers* (1959), after the first line of Louis Aragon's poem 'Elsa je t'aime'; or *Chanson de gestes* (1966), a pun on the genre of the Old French epic poem. If *Soleil éteint* recalls a line from the Parnassian poet Catulle Mendès, whose 'Spleen d'été' rather aptly characterises the characters' morose mood, the title of his short TV documentary *La Poésie est dans la rue* (1970) sounds like the poetic manifesto of a director intent on capturing the beauty of faces and places in films resolutely grounded in the everyday.⁴

For Gilles, 'a flower, a wall, a street or the face of Greta Garbo are [...] equally "vehicles" of poetry and sources of emotion. It all depends on how you look at them' (Gilles ca. 1967). If poetry, for the director, is essentially a question of looking, its cinematic expression by necessity relies on a certain quality of the image: 'I think it's impossible to translate cinematic poetry, in the Wellesian sense of the word, using anything other than images and plasticity: "the camera is an eye in the poet's head"' (*ibid.*). Poetry, as filmmaker Yann Gonzalez points out, permeates all aspects of Gilles's cinema: 'every photograph is a model of composition and framing, beauty bursts forth in a deluge of formal discoveries and moving gestures, the slightest shot [...] asserts itself as an incandescent poetic act' (Gonzalez 2003, 259). While some contemporary critics mistook his preoccupation with form for futile aestheticism,⁵ most reviewers hailed the poetic dimension and profound sensitivity of his films, culminating in Jean-Claude Guiguet's homage to this 'messenger of a cinema of poetry' (Guiguet 1996, 19) in *Cahiers du cinéma* after the filmmaker's death from AIDS in 1996.

Shattered memories

Gilles's wistful *Au pan coupé* (*Wall Engravings*, 1967), the second film of what could be called his trilogy of errancy,⁶ can best be described as a poetic attempt to keep present – through the resurrectional powers of the moving image – those who have departed. Seven minutes into the film, the rebellious protagonist Jean (Patrick Jouané), one of the many hypersensitive, searching young men that populate the director's work, runs away, leaving his partner Jeanne (Macha Méril) grieving about his disappearance. His camaraderie with a group of beatniks seems at first to chart a journey of self-discovery in the style of Jack Kerouac, the 'father of the Beat generation', whose rejection of

American middle-class values and restless wandering, manifest in the many alter-egos of his books, resonate with Jean's uncompromising quest for freedom. Yet *Au pan coupé* is a far cry from Ray Smith's search of spiritual enlightenment in *The Dharma Bums* (1958) or Jack DuLoz's boozy retreats in the Californian canyons in *Big Sur* (1962). Affirming 'I am not a beatnik' – rather like Kerouac himself in an interview shortly before his death (Lelyveld 1969) – Jean embarks on a solitary journey, succumbing to fever and hunger, not unlike Mona (Sandrine Bonnaire) in Agnès Varda's better-known *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*, 1985) some twenty years later. The remainder of the film will be devoted to remembering and understanding Jean, as Jeanne – unaware of her beloved's demise – is beset by memories of their shared life. Unburdened by any conventional demands of plot development, *Au pan coupé* in minute detail charts the emotional pain of a young woman faced with an unexplainable loss.

In a vertiginous criss-crossing between past and present, Gilles interweaves images of Jeanne grieving for the departure of Jean with her reminiscences of privileged moments of the couple's happiness. While the present is filmed in a mournful black-and-white, rendered almost spectral by the persistent over-exposure of the image, the flashbacks of memory are in lush, vibrant colours evoking the cinema of Jacques Demy, one of the directors – along with Godard, Varda and Bresson – that Gilles admired most (Lépingle and Uzal 2014, 42–3). The film interpolates different time frames in rapid montage sequences where past and present are increasingly intermeshed, then collapsed into one another. At times, as is emblematised in a sequence where we see Jeanne walking alone in a wooded street, followed by a jump cut to a similarly composed shot of the two lovers kissing, the flashbacks to the past are so rapid that they seem to tear the image open, making it porous to different temporalities, snippets of lost time recovered through memory. Named after the café where the two lovers used to meet, *Au pan coupé* is originally an architectural term, referring to the 'slanted connection replacing the angle of two walls' (Larousse). Truthful to its title, the film's architecture establishes connections between two temporal planes by means of a montage practice that one is tempted to call 'au plan coupé', that is, a cutting up of the narrative into multiple shots that capture the fleetingness of time. Montage, in Gilles's work, unlike the dialectical montage of Eisenstein or Godard, does not juxtapose to create meaning, but, rather, conjures up poetic moments in a shattered mosaic of time. Each shot signifies for itself – an evanescent moment of living is turned into an instant of pure poetry. Gilles's cinema does not order, impose or enclose; it does not aim to shock, illustrate or represent, but creates moments of 'time in its pure state' (Proust 2000, 224) that at once invoke the immediacy of presence and its inherent transience. Like an extension of the 'image poem' (Thiher 1976, 955–56) sequence of Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), whose coda shot of Anna Karina looking out on the city with a copy of Paul Éluard's *Capitale de la douleur* pressed against the window-pane is referenced in the opening shot of *Au pan coupé*,⁷ the entire film becomes poetry. Or rather, it invents a new form of cine-poetry that enshrines the evanescent moment in the seemingly permanent film image.



Figure 1. Natacha (Anna Karina) in *Alphaville* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)



Figure 2. Jeanne (Macha Méril) in *Au pan coupé* (Guy Gilles, 1967)

Freed from the linear strictures of narrative, *Au pan coupé* is acutely attentive to the gestures and bodily postures of the lovers, forming what, in a variation on Barthes, one could call ‘fragments of a lover’s gestures’ (Barthes 1978). In images of their happier days, we often see their hands in close-up, tenderly interlocked or caressing, in stark contrast to Jeanne’s listless gestures in the present, such as when her hand comes to rest on a bag replete with objects that belonged to their shared life or pensively strokes her furrowed brow. At first glance, Gilles’s predilection for close-ups of faces and body parts such as hands and feet recalls Godard’s almost abstract, tableau-like compositions of the female anatomy in *Une femme mariée* – the film that launched Macha Méril’s career. Yet whereas Godard’s film indulges in a purely formal exploration of the painterly possibilities of the cinematic medium (Schmid 2019, 110–11), here the close-up is used to give full expression to the characters’ most intimate states, to the fragmentation of existence, and to the heightened sense of inescapable finitude.⁸ Though similarly underpinned by a painterly, plastic conception of the image, Gilles pays attention to the fleeting gestures, postures and facial expressions of his characters as an outward projection of their inner emotions. Macha Méril’s subtly expressive face in particular becomes the vehicle for ‘speaking’ the demise of their love. As Marguerite Duras, an early supporter of Gilles’s work, comments:

Here, finally, love isn’t shown from an embrace-in-a-hotel-bed. Its evocation by the face – the face of a woman fifty times repeated, but for a shadow, a glance, a contraction under the stress of the wound – is quite simply admirable (cit. in Forret, 2022a, 182).



Figure 3. Gestures of Interiority (Guy Gilles, *Au pan coupé*, 1967)

About two-thirds into the film, in the sequence of the lovers' retreat to Provence, over a shot of the Mediterranean, suffused in the reddish-gold hue of the rising sun, we hear the two lovers citing fragments of poetry in voice-over. Jean's evocation of Rimbaud's 'Bateau ivre' ('The Drunken Boat', 1871), preceded by a direct address to the poet as 'Arthur my brother', places him in the legacy of the rebel-poet and former run-away, who gave up his art at the age of 23, leading a life of errancy until his premature death aged 37. His Rimbaudian quote 'The Dawns are heartbreaking' testifies to the state of lucid disillusion that has taken hold of the young man. By contrast, Jeanne's quote is an assemblage of lines from the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas's 1934 'Light breaks where no sun shines', a poem tracing the inner workings of hope as images of light break through when 'logic dies' (v. 27) and 'the dawn halts' (v. 30). Underpinned by these two opposing but magnetically complementary poetic imaginaries, the film is constructed around the tension between Jean's inability to accept the possibility of happiness and Jeanne's attempts to re-kindle his love for nature to bring him back to life.

If on the surface, poetry is called upon as a separate medium to be used in concert with cinema, to reinforce characterisation and implicitly develop themes such as death, self-discovery and the quest for freedom, it is never merely a source of citation or external referentiality in Gilles's work. Rather like in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), similarly shot through with Rimbaudian moments, it is a mode of seeing and of reaching, albeit transiently, authentic being, what Yves Bonnefoy calls 'presence' (Bonnefoy 2010, 136). The poetic in Gilles's work intimates a mode of (un-)inhabiting – together but on one's own terms – the world that the director intermedially re-creates in cinematic form.⁹

Textures of seeing and feeling

Poetic cinema, we noted earlier, is characterised by a heightened attention to detail, which affords spectators alternative experiences of viewing and sensing, liberated from the demands of plot. In *Au pan coupé*, as in his cinematic œuvre more widely, Gilles shifts the emphasis from shots supporting the narrative to more poetic images that engage viewers in an affective dialogue, drawing on association rather than logic or conceptual reasoning. Less preoccupied with the poetics of everyday objects evinced in works like *L'Amour à la mer* (*Love at Sea*, 1963), *Le Clair de terre* or *La Loterie de la vie* (1977), the film is attentive to the poetic potential of architectural forms that are repeatedly summoned in montage scenes devoid of human presence.¹⁰ The sequence that recounts the discovery of Jean's body in an abandoned garden in the suburbs of Lyon is emblematic of Gilles's poetic exploration of the forms and textures of the material world. Metonymically displacing Jean's demise, the camera cuts to mournful images of peri-urban decay – a ramshackle shed, shattered glass roof, dangling telegraph poles, accompanied by a voice over spoken by Gilles himself. For a few brief moments, we seem to behold the world as seen through the eyes of Jean, the abstract shots of lines of electric wires cut out against a hazy grey sky allegorizing human destinies separated by social determinisms, but also perhaps the lovers' lives running parallel but never able to join. A similar architectural montage punctures the narrative in the later scene when Jeanne collects photos and objects associated with Jean from her flat: a quick assemblage of shots capturing the entrance hall, fissured ceiling, and a banister framed from different angles, heightened by a sudden surge of dramatic music, poignantly conjures Jean's presence through the very absence of human figures in the architectural space. 'Poetics creates (in the spectator) an imaginary world open to the senses, allowing us to experience a presence in/to the world', writes Patrick Brun in an attempt to define the poetic in cinema (Brun 2013, 12). It is precisely this presence, this making present or immediacy of the image, that is at the heart of Gilles's cinepoetics. As in Proust, to whom Gilles has dedicated a poetic documentary, *Proust, l'art et la douleur* (1971), and whose imaginary – at once mournful and salvific – is often evoked in his films, objects and places in Gilles's works preserve the traces of human existence long after those who once owned or inhabited them have departed. Connecting past and present, the material world carries a particular poetic charge in the director's cinema: not only for its stark plastic beauty, but also for its mnemonic qualities and its capacity to heighten our perception.

Halting the flow of the narrative, the architectural montage sequences invite spectators to open themselves up to the manifold textures of life, normally covered by distorting habits of seeing. Gilles gives a texture to emotion, laying it bare in its multi-layered flesh.



Figure 4. Architectures (Guy Gilles, *Au pan coupé*, 1967)

In the director's work the poetic is inseparable from the painterly, the photographic or the architectural, which become vehicles for poetic exploration. Just how porous these various arts are in Gilles's intermedial cinema can be gleaned from the sequence that has given the film its English title, *Wall Engravings*. Struck by the raw beauty of fissured walls covered in peeling paint, Jean encourages Jeanne to paint the textures of the walls identically as they are found in the urban fabric. When she objects that such attempts already exist in painting and even in photography – in all likelihood an allusion to Jean Dubuffet's 1945 series of lithographs entitled *Les Murs* [Walls], inspired by Parisian graffiti as well as Eugène Guillevic's eponymous poem, and to Brassai's photographs of wall engravings and markings of the early 1930s – he retorts: 'It doesn't matter. Otherwise there's no point in writing poems either; they're already on the walls'. Poetry, then, is not confined to one – exclusively verbal – medium. In Gilles's fluid understanding of the interconnections and pathways between the arts, poetry has the capacity to migrate into other art forms such as architecture, painting, or indeed, film. This interchange between the arts is signalled at various instances in the film, for example when the drawing of a reclining young woman showcased in a cut-away shot is emulated in filmic form in the subsequent shot, capturing Macha Méril in a similar posture. Or in Méril's framing against a portrait of a young woman – in fact the portrait of Gilles's mother, which also makes an appearance in *L'Amour à la mer* and *Le Clair de terre* – which reveals a striking resemblance between the woman in the picture and the actress. Refusing any kind of spectacular images, the director seeks to convey his personal experience of apprehending the world through the expressive means of cinema: 'It's like trying to show a landscape as you've seen it yourself, trying to translate the poetry of light, a very subjective poetry that needs to be objectified' (Lépingle and Uzal 2014, 49).



Figure 5. Wall Engravings (Guy Gilles, *Au pan coupé*, 1967)

Gilles intermedial practice disenclaves the arts, showing the potential of each of them for poetic expression as essentially a form of vision conveyed through the specific properties of each medium. The director's predilection for close-ups, long takes and repeated use of blur effects – the latter giving an impressionistic, painterly quality to some of the shots in *Au pan coupé* – divests the images of their mimetic function, freeing their plastic and poetic potential. Whereas these explorations of cine-poetry and cine-plastics remain within the confines of narrative cinema in his features and documentaries, his work gestures towards abstraction in its emphasis on abstract patterns, such as the play of shadows of Jeanne's straw hat on her delicate face or the abstracted lines of the stair railing (in emulation of the photogenic shots in avant-garde cinema as set out by Epstein and Dulac).¹¹ Gilles was to pursue these experiments further in a film entitled *Poèmes électriques*, on which he was working during the last twenty years of his life, but which sadly remained unfinished. Stripped of any narrative, this experimental work, according to the testimony of one of his closest collaborators, Jérôme Pescayré, was to capture the lights of the nocturnal city, reflections of shop windows and luminous signs of bars, especially in the Pigalle district: 'The film's conception was quite loose, it rested only on the neon lights of Paris and people met by chance at night' (Lépingle 2005).

A poetics of the real

In Gilles's cinema, everyday reality, rather than merely being a signifier of the banal and the humdrum, is at the very source of his poetic vision of life. In the tradition of Eugène Atget and the Surrealist photographers, the director is attentive to the poetic quality of shop windows, mannequins, photo albums, and all sorts of bibelots and bric-à-brac – objects that, in the very absence of humans, capture our sometimes futile, often sentimental, attachment to material things that will outlive us (Schmid 2019, 117–20). This poetic quality is akin to buried memories that cinema can disclose, bring back to life in all their living textures. Yet the real also punctures his fictions in a more direct way in the numerous cutaway shots to documentary-like scenes that punctuate the fictional narrative. Thus, a shot of Jeanne looking out of the window of her flat introduces a sequence of images of an elderly woman sitting on a bench, holding on frailly to the backrest. The scene recalls Baudelaire's 'Les Petites vieilles' ('The Little Old Women'), one of several poems dedicated to the marginalised figures of nineteenth-century Paris from his *Flowers of Evil* (Baudelaire 1998, 181–86). Through the eyeline-match, we see Jeanne seeing, but as in Baudelaire's poetry, we become spectators of what urban modernity seeks to hide from our sight: the destitute, the elderly and the poor. In a later scene in a parc, Jeanne's eyes come to rest on an adolescent boy slumbering in the shade. A series of shots, from different angles and distances, capture the adolescent's face as he sleepily opens his eyes. Who is this boy on the cusp of adulthood? What is his destiny? What are his dreams and aspirations? We will never know, but the short sequence has afforded us a glimpse of his life and an aperçu of reality, seemingly unstaged and poetic in its ephemerality. If in documentaries such as *Chanson de gestes*, *La poésie est dans la rue* or *La Loterie de la vie*, Gilles captures the poetry of the quotidian, in brief documentary scenes like this his features also become porous to real life, which intermittently makes an entrance into the fiction. This poetic conjuring of the real goes beyond the oft-evoked documentary quality of New Wave cinema, where the spectacle of the street – though unadulterated and beguiling – tends to form a mere backdrop to the fictional plots or acts as props to the narrative arc, producing what Barthes calls a 'reality effect' (Barthes 1989 [1969]). Unlike, for instance, in Godard's iconic Champs-Élysées sequence in *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), where the presence of anonymous passers-by – caught unaware by Raoul Coutard's hidden camera – adds to the quasi unmediated feel of the characters' interaction, in Gilles's work the documentary micro-sequences are imbued with a genuine interest in the filmed subjects for themselves.

Expanding on the photogenic moments of faces, landscapes and objects that would define Epstein's films in particular, Gilles's cinepoetics resonates with the real rather than aims at expressing or showing it through a mimetic camera eye. Jean, Jeanne, and every detail of the film are woven into

the living texture of his images, what Pierre Fédida called the ‘indistinct breathing of images’ (Fédida 1995, 188). The rhythm of *Au pan coupé*, whose title itself suggests a halting pattern of breathing,¹² syncopated or endowed with seeming diuturnity, slow or accelerated, is not mechanical or symbolic but is close to breathing, either anxious or elated, panting or arrested. Never continuous, the rhythm follows the characters’ physical gestures, which vacillate between the mechanical and the organic, and alludes to their states of mind and shades of emotion, immediately creating an atmosphere of intimacy between the viewer and the viewed, a bond and not an injunction. Hence the use of childhood photographs of Macha Méril and Patrick Jouané shown in rapid succession and interpolated with the proper names of actors and film crew in the opening credits, bringing us closer to a stage of life that is probably the most proximate to poetry, that is, of pure potentiality and creation before conceptual thought takes hold of our perception of the world.¹³ This rhythm (a sensitive montage, more caress or lyrical-like than the spectacular montage of attractions theorised by Eisenstein, or the elliptical montage propounded by Bresson¹⁴), is crucial to understand Gilles’s cine-poetic approach to the real, through the very means of illusion embodied by the film image. Profoundly anti-ideological but situated during the heyday of ideologies (1960s–1980s) in politics and in the arts (and never more so than in cinema and poetry via the post-Marxist structuralist turn), Gilles’s work, at once pure poetry and pure cinema, rejects the main ideological aesthetics of the time (formalist versus realist; avant-garde versus mainstream). Gilles playfully mixes what he finds adequate to his own vision of what cinema is, which is how he apprehends the real, fully experienced in its own being, and not in its predicates, dreams, or fantasies. Not only the real that he sees, witnesses and experiences himself, but how he sees people around him live or recount it, through their own – often silenced or belittled – stories, gazes, gestures, or everyday banter and yatter, rendered in all its raw immediacy. Gilles’s cinema ushers in, celebrates even, what cinema, but also poetry, have often deemed unworthy of attention, including sentimentality and the constant flux of everyday, quotidian, banal, and therefore commonly shared, emotions.



Figure 6. Snippets of the real (Guy Gilles, *Au pan coupé*, 1967)

This reawakening, memory even, of the real through the mediation and rhythms of the everyday aligns Gilles’s aesthetic with that of the poet Yves Bonnefoy. For the latter, poetry is not specific to any art (it could be found in a poem, prose, but also in a song, painting, film, landscape etc), but it is always an act of presence, a way of transgressing conceptual thinking, language and images to recover a more authentic approach to the real – imbued with what has been lost, but always itself evanescent; anchored in times and places, open to chance, but always fully aware of finitude itself, and fearlessly so. This approach is never ending and never fully achieved, being wholly bound up

with finitude, but all the more alive to social and personal existence as it is forged through a willing alliance of purpose, a common attention to the living. The rhythm of *Au pan coupé*, unique to this film as other rhythms will be to his other films but also to any being, becomes a living sign of the presence the film strives to attain, make us see, sense, and share, beyond any moral judgement or ideological grid. Jean and Jeanne's story is uniquely theirs as it could be anybody's, at a particular juncture in time, culture, language. Contrary to how many critics ascertained his films as idiosyncratic and self-indulgent, mawkish or effete, Gilles's cinepoetics – for his work is conceived at once as poetry and as cinema, intermedially fused and transmuted into the breathing / living rhythm of its images – divests our habitual gazes of their habits of seeing, judging and thinking, to make us perceive the real as it truly is, at once translatable and untranslatable, but always constitutive of a sharable moment, an evanescent, but how promising, moment of common living. As the director states in a 1968 interview:

Cinema is a plastic, autonomous art. The image must express thoughts, feelings, sensations... A good image is more expressive than any word or sentence. Sound becomes an integral part of the image content. Proust said that everyone has a book written inside them and that the author is the one who tries to read this book and copy it. Taking up this idea, we could present the filmmaker as someone who has images inside them (images taken literally) and who, using a camera, tries to make them real. These images will then be vehicles of poetry, that meeting point between the translatable and the untranslatable (Baby 1968).

This translatable and untranslatable facet, this Janus-like dyad that seems so characteristic of Gilles's films, characters, vision, could be more simply put through the Proustian notion of 'intermittences of the heart' (Proust 1992, 174), that is, the sudden bouts of reminiscence that bring a lost person back to life, but also the painful awareness that oblivion will erode the work of memory. Having understood that Jean's journey must end in death, withering away in her turn, at the end of the film Jeanne asks poignantly: 'Jean, all is fragile, can one live on a memory?'

Towards a cinepoetics of presence

In his article 'The False Movements of Cinema', in line with Bresson's assertive remarks in *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Bresson 1975, 47–48), Badiou cautions against the idea of a genuine movement between the arts:

there really is no way of operating the movement from one art to another. The arts are closed. No painting will ever become music, no dance will turn into a poem. All direct attempts of this sort are vain. Nevertheless, cinema is effectively the organisation of these impossible movements (Badiou 2013, 92).



Figure 7. Jean (Patrick Jouané) and Jeanne (Macha Méril) (Guy Gilles, *Au pan coupé*, 1967)

While it is indeed arguable whether there can be any direct transfer from one art to another, a director like Gilles clearly shows that an aesthetic category like the ‘poetic’ is in no way confined to the single medium of literature. As Bonnefoy, who shares with Gilles a similar vision of the poetic as reaching beyond the verbal sphere, reminds us: ‘[w]orks of cinema show in their own way that the poetic perception of the world is still possible outside the realm of literature [...] with the same intensity as *Werther* or *Nadja*’ (Bonnefoy 2010, 130). In the tradition of Epstein and Dulac – who both advocated cinema as the privileged poetic medium (Aumont 1988 and Dulac 2021) – Gilles explores cinema’s profoundly poetic potentialities. Jean and Jeanne, his two allegorical yet fully fleshed expressive figures of creation, become the vehicles of cinepoetics, one face turned towards the fugitive, the transience of life’s immediacies and absolute revolt, the other turned towards the fullness of the living moment, the patient recording of what has been irrevocably lost, and absolute, yet unyielding, melancholy. Jean and Jeanne retrace their own steps and as they are doing so, recreating each moment for themselves, as if filming themselves endlessly, they invite viewers, on their own and collectively, to join in, to bring their own inner images, and create their cine-poems. Gilles’s richly intermedial films create a porous space where poetry and cinema – but also the work and the audience – are able to fuse; where the poetic can breathe freely in narratives unburdened by teleology and plot, or by the fixities of concepts; where the world that we share, to cite Yves Bonnefoy’s quote from the epigraph, can regain ‘the face of its presence’.

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Notes

¹ Bonnefoy 1990, 58. All translations are ours, unless otherwise indicated.

² See also Pasolini 1976.

³ For an excellent overview of the interactions between poetry and film and of historic and contemporary conceptions of ‘film poetry and the poetic film’, see Bollig and Wood 2022. For a wider exploration of the cinema of poetry, see Sitney 2015.

⁴ For the poetic in Gilles’s films, see also Forret 2022a, 267–71 and *passim*, and Forret 2022b.

⁵ See for instance Mouillet 1965.

⁶ Composed of *L’Amour à la mer* (*Love at Sea*, 1963), *Au pan coupé* and *Le Clair de terre*, three films centred on drifting young male characters.

⁷ Godard’s influence as a tutelary figure reverberates in other aspects of the film, not least the casting of Macha Méril, who came to prominence in Godard’s *Une femme mariée* (1964), and the brief idyll of the two lovers in Provence, evoking the lyrical sequence on the Île de Porquerolles in Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Yet if Gilles is often compared to Godard – one commentator calls him ‘a Godard with a heart’ (Coppermann 2008) –, the tone and sensibility of his films are distinctly different, shaped by an acute awareness of the transience of all things.

⁸ For Yves Bonnefoy, finitude is what is denied by conceptual thought or language, and what is intrinsically dependent on time, place and chance (Bonnefoy 2010, 136).

⁹ For forms of inhabiting the world and the poetic in a ‘cinema of the real’, see Maury 2011.

- ¹⁰ It should be noted that in *Au pan coupé*, everyday gestures or objects differ from Ponge's and Bresson's poetics of cinema, and from Jean-Daniel Pollet's poetic film inspired by Ponge, *Dieu sait quoi* (1994). On Ponge, Bresson and Pollet, and their more radically conceptual aesthetic of the poetic image, see Met 2019.
- ¹¹ On *photogénie*, see Thiéry 2016 and Wall-Romana 2013a and 2013b. On Epstein and Gilles, see also Forret 2022a.
- ¹² 'Souffle coupé' in French refers to a condition of breathlessness.
- ¹³ On childhood as a moment of plenitude and pure presence, see Bonnefoy 2013, 129.
- ¹⁴ See Arnaud 2016 and Chevallier 2016. On Bresson, see Met 2019, 43.

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Ekphrasis as Intra-action: Re-reading “Photograph from September 11” by Wislawa Szymborska

EMMA TORNBORG

In loving memory of Lars Elleström

The first time I wrote about Wislawa Szymborska’s poem “Photograph from September 11” (“Fotografia z 11 września”) was in my dissertation, 2014. I chose it because it was so very intermedial, so to speak. It is an ekphrasis, a poem about a photograph, where the media specificities of both the written text and the photograph are highlighted in intricate ways. The more times I read it, the more fascinated I became by the structure of the poem, and moreover, by how it treated temporality and spatiality. I have always felt that I was not yet done with that poem, which is why I now return to it, once again with an intermedial approach: I will examine how the poem approaches the spatiotemporal properties of the involved media types and what role they play in its conveyance of respect, grief, and empathy. Furthermore, I will use Karen Barad’s posthumanist theory on agential realism to discuss the ethical and intermedial implications of entanglement and separateness between observer and observed, as well as between verbal text and photograph. My aim is to show that Szymborska, by engaging in the media specific affordances of photographs and texts respectively, in her poem renegotiates temporality and the relationship between subject and object.

“Photograph from September 11” and its source media product

Szymborska’s poem “Photograph from September 11” is an ekphrasis representing a photograph from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. We cannot be sure which photograph is the source medium product. In fact, it does not have to be solely one photograph that is represented in the poem, but many (ekphrasis is not always a one-to-one relation, see for example Tamar Yacobi, 1998). We have all seen the images, and a simple google search will give us plenty of possible sources. The most iconic photograph, which is often called “The falling man”, is perhaps the one that first comes to mind, but in that picture, there is only one person, and the first line of the poem reads: “They jumped from the burning floors –”, in Polish the first line goes: “Skoczyli z płonących pięter w dół”: (They jumped from the burning floors down). The source media product – if there is one specific source – then must be another, and there are a few examples of photographs from 9-11 where you can clearly see more than one person falling from the buildings, for example a photograph by David Surowiecki (Time Photo Department, September 8, 2011).

Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis is a genre or a trope that has its roots in Ancient Greece, where it was used as a rhetoric practice with the goal of being able to describe something so vividly that the listeners could see it in their own minds. Later, the term came to denote first and foremost writing about works of art in prose or poetry (Ruth Webb 2009), even though other types of media representation have been called ekphrasis as well, for example representations of music in literature, which is why Claus Clüver (2007) defines ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (p. 26). The academic interest for ekphrasis has grown significantly

during the last four decades, no doubt because of the rapid development of intermedial studies, originating chiefly from the field of comparative literature. Ekphrasis is distinct enough to be able to separate from other types of writing, but broad enough to harbor a multitude of theoretical perspectives related to intermedial studies, such as gender studies, semiotics, multimodal studies, cognitive science, and narratology.¹ For example, as James A.W. Heffernan (1991) shows, a gendered reading of the relationship between the verbal text and the graphic image is a fruitful approach, given the properties associated with women and men, and images and texts, respectively. Overall, the age-old word/image hierarchy debate beginning with Plato, via da Vinci to G. E. Lessing and forwards demonstrates that the relationship between the symbolic and the iconic sign systems is littered with notions of power, subordination, supremacy, and imitation (see for example W.J.T. Mitchell, 1986). It is thus fruitful to discuss ekphrasis in terms of othering practices: Does the ekphrasis give voice and power to the (silent) source medium, or is it instead speaking *for* it, thus undermining its non-verbal communication mode? The posthumanist perspective, with its aim to resolve dichotomies that have shaped the humanist understanding of the world for centuries, can contribute to the discussion of othering practices in ekphrasis in constructive ways, which I will return to shortly.

Ekphrastic texts usually focus either predominantly on the content of the source media product, or on both the content and the media specificities of the source media product. The allure of ekphrasis however lies in the latter, in which the text conjures up not only the subject matter, but also the properties of the photograph or the painting as media types, for example the two-dimensionality, the iconicity, the framing, and so on. An ekphrasis can also underline the tension between different sign systems, by resisting the narrative impulse and temporality of literature² and instead imitate the halted movement and the immobility that we usually associate with paintings or photographs.

In the following, I will elaborate to some extent on the photograph's spatiotemporal properties and the ethical and emotional implications of photographing dead or dying people, as well as what implications these aspects and properties have for ekphrasis.

The Photograph: A medium of loss

In the final episode of the HBO series *Six Feet Under* (Alan Ball 2001–2005), Claire is leaving home to move to New York. When she is about to take a last photograph of her loved ones gathered to say goodbye, her dead brother Nate whispers in her ear: "You can't take a picture of this, it is already gone". This line has stuck with me throughout the years, and I have often returned to it in my mind. The moment and the people in that moment are not gone: they are there, alive; the moment takes place right then so how can it be gone? Perhaps because in the very moment Claire snaps that photo, it belongs to the past and what is left is a representation, although with a strong likeness to its source. The next moment is similar to the one photographed, but it is not *that* moment; it is another one. The represented moment is gone when the picture is taken, or the other way around: when the picture is taken, the moment is gone.

However, despite the truth in Nate's words, we use photographs to save people and places, and more importantly, our interactions with them, from the flood of time. If we capture a specific moment, we can go back to it and still be there and then. We can forget about the flood for a moment and immerse ourselves in the image before our eyes. Or can we? Perhaps the photograph itself, as a medium, points not to an eternal aliveness but to the opposite: the eternity of non-existence that comes after the act of photographing. Roland Barthes reflects upon this in his essay *Camera Lucida* (1989):

For the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (79)

Nathan's words "it is already gone" echo Barthes': "it is already dead" and they refer to the same thing: something that is photographed is always in the past. However, the moment it represents was once a "now", and since a photograph doesn't move or change, it remains a "now" in eternity. This is another aspect of the temporality of a photograph – the tension between the motive and the medium itself. A photograph can depict a landscape or a sleeping person and thus convey a sense of stillness. However, it can also depict bodies captured in movement: someone running, a plane flying, or a group of dolphins playing among the waves, and still evoke a sensation of stasis, depending, among other things, on whether the viewer focuses on the motive separated from the specificities of the photographic medium: someone or something moving, or on the motive entangled with the affordances and specificities of the photographic medium: a movement frozen in time. Lars Elleström (2021) calls this phenomenon, where the represented object is perceived as having different spatiotemporal properties compared to those of the representing media product ("the media products' actual presemiotic modality modes"), *cross modal representation*:

In the context of communication, these abilities explain the imperative phenomenon that meaning-making often goes beyond the media product's actual presemiotic modality modes. For instance, a visual, two-dimensional and static image may represent something that is perceived to be both three-dimensionally spatial and temporal, such as a deer running in the forest. (—) in line with the concept of media modalities, cross-modal here means the linking of all forms of different presemiotic modes within the same media modality. More specifically, cross-modality should be understood here as *cross-material, cross-spatiotemporal and cross-sensorial representation through iconicity, indexicality or symbolicity*. (68–69)

When we interpret a photograph, the spatiotemporal modes of the the represented object(s) (the properties of the "content") merges with our knowledge of the presemiotic spatiotemporal modes of the media product (the properties of the "form"), which is why photographs are often described as moments or movements captured in time, or frozen.

Agential Realism and the Act of Observing

In her article "Ekphrasis, photography, and ethical strategies of witness: poetic responses to Emmett Till", Sarah Holland-Batt (2018) discusses the ethical implications of ekphrastic texts representing documentary photographs that depict dead, dying or suffering people. Holland-Batt refers to Susan Sonntag and Barbie Zelizer who have criticized (documentary) photography for being exploiting and for normalizing cruelty, inviting viewers to watch individuals they don't know in exposed situations without their consent. While this is doubtlessly true, photographs also function as evidence and eye-opener with the potential of playing an important role in revealing injustices or calling perpetrators to account. This potential has to do with the medium's function as both an icon and an index, famously discussed by Charles Sanders Peirce: Peirce used the photograph as an example of a sign that is both iconic, since it relates to its motive in terms of likeness, and an index: a physical connection between the sign and its object: "they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature" (Peirce 1894, n.p) In other words, the photograph functions as "proof" that the photographer and the motive were near each other when the photograph was taken.³ The iconic properties of photographs also contribute to its truth claims: no other visual, graphic representations are as exact as photographs in terms of likeness. Ekphrasis, on the other hand, is not a graphic image but consists of text. Which responsibilities, Holland-Batt (2018) asks, does the writer have when transmediating a photograph, documenting suffering and death of others, to text? To answer that question, I will use posthumanist theories of entanglement and subjectivity.

Quantum physicist, posthumanist and feminist thinker Karen Barad's major contribution to the posthumanist field is her notion of agential realism. Barad (2007) describes her position as an ethico-onto-epistemology since it attempts to cover the ontology of the world, the nature of our knowledge about it, as well as the ethical implications of that knowledge. An agential realist approach questions

the representationalist claim that we only have access to representations of objects and not to the objects themselves. This view separates the world in two categories: words and things, or with Descartes' words: mind and matter. Barad's aim is to show that we can know things about the outer world, but the outer world does not consist of static, mute, and neutral matter, "objects", but of phenomena, which are the result of the dynamic and ongoing intra-action⁴ between what is observed and the agencies of observation. Thus, agential realism does not subscribe to the constructivist idea that language creates reality, nor to the positivist idea that that reality and our conceptualizing of it exist independently of each other. Instead, discourses affect reality on a material level, just as matter affect discourses. We, as beings, are involved in a constant intra-action with other beings as well as non-living matter, and that intra-action *is* agency. There is no such thing as an inherent separateness between entities, no interior/exterior boundaries. When we observe something, we are ourselves part of that which we observe. The apparatuses we use when we observe are themselves phenomena: dynamic and without inherent boundaries. Every observation makes an agential cut which creates a subject and an object in that specific case. However, agential cuts are separations inside phenomena: there is no exteriority. Furthermore, they can be made everywhere and therefore, the relation between subject and object is unstable; it is constantly dynamic, changing, and rearticulated. We can only observe something as separate from something else in specific instances and from specific viewpoints. Although agential cuts are necessary for the survival of all living being (for example, a zebra that cannot separate between itself and a lion has little chance of survival), they also produce othering practices that have negative consequences. From a posthumanist perspective, the nature/culture dichotomy, which throughout history has created agential cuts between humans and other living and non-living entities, as well as between men and women and between white Western people and people from other parts of the world, is inherently false and destructive (see for example Barad 2007, Rosie Braidotti 2013, and Donna Haraway 2016). Therefore, Barad says, we need to be alert to the agential cuts we participate in making, as well as to the apparatuses we use when making them. Apparatuses, according to Barad (2007) "are to be understood not as ... static instrumental embodiments of human concepts, but as open-ended and dynamic material-discursive practices, through which specific 'concepts' and 'things' are articulated" (334). Thus, if we consider the camera as an apparatus of observation in Barad's view (which Birk Weiberg does in his 2021 article "The Entangled Apparatuses: Cameras as Non-distancing Devices"), we realize that it has never been, as Paul Levinson (1997) has suggested, "a mute, unbiased witness of reality" (41), nor does it play a merely "mediating role" (Barad, 2007, 231). Instead, the camera is a part of the phenomenon it produces⁵, which consists of the object being photographed by someone in a particular way, with a particular apparatus, in a particular moment, from a particular distance, with a particular intention, and of all these aspects in intra-action: "Apparatuses are not mere instruments serving as a system of lenses that magnify and focus our attention on the object world, rather they are laborers that help constitute and are an integral part of the phenomena being investigated" (Barad 2007, 232). The camera, like all machines, has its own historicity and phylogenesis (see Félix Guattari 1995, 40). It has intra-acted with humans in different ways within different discourses and for different reasons. From an intermedial viewpoint, photography as a medium is filled with often contradictory notions, meanings, and values, what Elleström (2021) calls "the contextual qualifying aspects" of a medium (60). To conclude this section, an agential realist view on an ekphrasis of a photograph is that it is the result of an intra-action involving the subject matter, the photographer, the apparatus (the camera), the viewers, the poet (who is herself a viewer), and the readers (who are also viewers, viewing both their own inner image evoked by the poem, and the source image itself, available in newspapers and online), that affects and redefines all the involved entities in various ways. In intermedial terms, the transmediation of the subject matter from photograph to paper and ink is a material and medial reconfiguration which also entails a "translation" (what Roman Jakobson (1963) calls intersemiotic transposition) from an iconic to a symbolic sign system.

Temporalities

Returning to Szymborska's ekphrasis, we must first establish what it represents. It does not merely transmediate the content of the photograph, it also represents the source medium *as* medium; it focuses on the media specificities of photography and meditates over the photographic modes *in relation* to the motive; its cross modal representation in Elleström's words. With agential realism in mind, the poem describes the fallers-as-observed, in this case, by a camera lens, which means that the poem itself can be defined as a description of the observed object-as-observed⁶. The poem has six stanzas: five stanzas consist of three lines each and one of four. The first two stanzas read as follows:

They jumped from the burning floors –
one, two, a few more,
higher, lower.

The photograph halted them in life,
and now keeps them
above the earth toward the earth

There are only two verbs in past tense in the poem: "jumped" and "halted", which semantically can be seen as opposites to each other. These two verbs set the scene, since the poem's subject matter is the event captured by camera, captured being an interesting metaphor for how photographs are usually regarded. The first stanza is shaped almost as an arrow pointing downwards, mimicking the direction of the fallers (which makes even more sense in the original since the first line includes the words "w dół": down), whereas the em dash at the end of the first line can be understood as an icon of "floors" ("pięter"). The next stanza, beginning with the line "The photograph halted them in life" introduces the source medium. It describes the chronological order of events; the photograph was taken after the jump, while the bodies were in the air. After that, the verbs change to present tense: "and now keeps them/above the earth/toward the earth". "Now" represents the moment after the photo was taken, and "now" is the poem's subject matter. Barthes (1989) suggests that the photograph's grammatical tense would be "aorist" (91), in Greek grammar denoting something that once happened, but I argue that the correct tense for all kinds of representing images is the present tense, because that is how we describe them: We say that Degas' dancers dance, not that they danced, and that Marilyn Monroe holds her skirt down in that particular photograph, not that she held it down. We know that photographs depict moments from the past, but we read them somehow as present, because photographs depict an eternal now, a now outside of time, which can only be described with present tense. From the point in Szymborska's poem where the photograph is taken and forwards, there can be only now.

Each is still complete,
with a particular face
and blood well hidden.

There's enough time
for hair to come loose,
for keys and coins
to fall from pockets.

The falling people are still complete: in the photograph they will always be. There is time for their hair to come loose or for things falling from their pockets, but it is not this time: the ekphrasis remains in the moment depicted in the source medium, thus resisting the narrative (or at least temporal) impulse embedded in both language and in our interpreting minds. In fact, despite the general notion that literature is a temporal medium (whereas painting and photography are spatial media), it is static in its material modality: printed words do not move on paper more than painted landscapes move on the canvas. Its temporality lies in its semiotic sign system, since symbolic signs must be

decoded in a sequence to make sense (according to Elleström this makes printed texts merely “second-order temporal” (49)), whereas iconic signs generally make sense in any order (you can finish a book, but can you finish a painting?). I would say that this specific source media product, however, prompts the viewer in a certain direction (top-down) both because of our previous knowledge of the event itself and, more generally, of how gravity works. Similarly, the poem starts from the top (the building from which they jumped) and continues downwards to a certain point, where it halts, “above the earth/toward the earth”:

They're still within the air's reach,
within the compass of places
that have just now opened.

At this exact moment, they are floating in the air, “still” (“jeszcze”), that is, immobile, but also implying there is still hope, or simply that the worst is yet to come. “Places that have just now opened” can be understood as the vertiginous view of the city that can only be seen from above, or, perhaps, it refers to places not belonging to this world. Both interpretations are possible given the phrase “within the air's reach” (“w zasięgu powietrza”). The poet looks at the image of the falling people, halted, kept in the air because of the specificities and affordances of the photographic medium and “can do only two things for them—describe this flight/and not add a last line.”

In her well-written analysis of the poem “Money Road” by Kevin Young (2016), Holland-Batt reflects over how Young uses the word “keep”: “Young's usage of the verb ‘keep’ is significant: Till here is both kept in the sense of being preserved and remembered in the photograph, but also frozen in his death, kept from living, forever ‘still’ in his bones” (472). The same verb (keep: *przechować*) is found in Szymborska's poem as well: “and now keeps them/above the earth toward the earth”. Holland-Batt points to the double meaning of keep in Young's poem: remembered but at the same time kept from living. Szymborska uses it in the sense of keeping safe, but it can also be understood as capture: In the photograph, the fallers are safe because the photograph stops them from falling. She also uses the verb halt: “The photograph halted them in life” (“Fotografia powstrzymała ich przy życiu”). Both verbs have a similar meaning and point to the photograph's ability to capture one fraction of a second for all eternity. At the exact moment when the photograph is taken, the bodies are motionless, just as in Zenon's Arrow Paradox. The same photograph cannot represent both this moment and the next, where the bodies would still be motionless but now closer to the ground. It can merely indicate it. The poetic I in “Photograph from September 11” reflects over that fact and draws the conclusion: The people-as-observed by the photographic apparatus are still alive, will always be alive, and that is the only mercy that is given. The agential cut made in the moment of taking that photograph is simultaneously erased, because, as the poetic I notes, the falling people are still persons, subjects, recognizable as such: “still complete, / with a particular face/and blood well hidden”. The photograph, as opposed to the sequential verbal text, allows them to stay that way forever. By not adding a last line, the poet imitates another medium, and by doing that she must restrain the temporality of her own. If the poet had written the poem after having witnessed the fall first-hand, she would never have described it as a static moment. This is only possible filtered through the medium of photography. The poem is thus the result of the intra-action between event, photographic medium and verbal medium.

The Ethical Implications of Watching and Representing Images

The “passive bystander” is not passive even though he or she neglects to intervene. Seeing something, perhaps photographing it, filming it, or in other ways making the incident known to others, might change the outcome and the perception of the event, thus affecting all the involved parties. Witnesses can act after the fact and their role is utterly important, but it comes with a moral obligation. A photograph or a film representing a victim in a vulnerable state can without the proper

context cause a lot of damage. Thus, how we display images, and how we talk or write about them, matters. In his essay *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972) points to the articulative advantage of verbal text: “In this essay each image reproduced has become part of an argument which has little or nothing to do with the painting’s original independent meaning. The words have quoted the paintings to confirm their own verbal authority” (28). As shown above, this inequality between words and pictures has been discussed throughout history and is of particular interest to ekphrasis theory (see for example Lund 1992 and Heffernan 1991). Even though one can argue that no media product has an “original meaning” since new meaning is produced every time someone interacts with it, it is hard to deny that words have the ability to attribute their own meaning to non-verbal media products, which Magritte’s work *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* is an excellent example of. Discourses are performative, Barad (2007) claims, because they affect matter. What we observe, how we observe and the way we talk about the things or events we observe, affect them on a material level. Therefore, we must all be accountable for the cuts we help to enact, since cuts are never made on an individual basis, they are the result of intra-actions:

We are responsible for the cuts that we help enact not because we do the choosing (neither do we escape responsibility because ‘we’ are ‘chosen’ by them), but because we are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe. Cuts are agentially enacted not by willful individuals but by the larger material arrangement of which ‘we’ are a ‘part.’ The cuts that we participate in enacting matter. (Barad 2007, 178)

The act of taking a photograph, of writing a poem about the photograph, and of reading that poem, are both themselves phenomena and agential cuts made inside the larger phenomenon, temporarily separating observer from observed. Ekphrastic writers must take account for the agential cut they participate in making, by representing the image, just as we, as readers, must take account for our part in the agential cut. As a photographer, a writer, and a reader of representations of traumatic events, we intra-act, thus creating agency: this agency is our responsibility. The agential cut, through intra-action, does not solely separate (although momentarily) the photographer and their motive, but all who watch the photograph and the people depicted: we are down here, safe; they are up there, in danger. This, however, is only one of many agential cuts made in the entanglement/phenomenon that was (and is) 9-11. The photographs and verbal descriptions of the attack play a role here, but many types of material-discursive apparatuses were used not only to describe and depict the disaster (both for documentary and artistic reasons), but also to advance or aggravate the situation: the “war on terrorism” discourse, the search for weapons of mass destruction using many types of apparatuses of observation, filmed and broadcasted statements from terrorist leaders et cetera. The cut made between the witnesses and the victims of the WTC is only one small part of all the reconfigurations of the intra-action of 9-11, but it points to a fundamental, ethical issue, raised by Susan Sonntag, Holland-Batt and many others: how do we describe or depict suffering without exploiting it?

In her article, Holland-Batt (2018) analyses ekphrastic poems representing the documentary photograph of Emmett Till, a black 14-year-old boy who was murdered by a mob of white men in 1955 after allegedly having been rude to a white woman. She finds that one main strategy in writing poems about powerful documentary photographs is metapoeticism:

The question of how the contemporary poet witnesses abject history in the ekphrastic poem becomes the subject of the ekphrastic poem alongside the photograph itself. Metapoetic ekphrasis casts the encounter between poet and photograph as one that is mediated through an individual subjectivity, and thus piecemeal, idiosyncratic and partial. The metapoetic turn in the ekphrastic poem shatters any illusion of ekphrasis as an act of simple translation, reframing it as an ultimately more vexed and complex enterprise. (474)

Cross modal ekphrastic texts are inherently metapoetical since they implicitly or explicitly comment on the affordances and specificities of their own media type in relation to the source media type.

Therefore, as Holland-Batt argues, there are often two subject matters in an ekphrastic poem: the source media product, and how to represent it. Furthermore, as Holland-Batt (2018) argues with the aid of Arturo Casas, metapoetical poetry questions the power of language and more specifically, the power and authority of the poet herself (474), thereby questioning how the photograph is represented and contextualized as well. In “Photograph from September 11”, the poetic I reflects over the limitations of her own media type and finds that all she can do is “describe this flight/and not add a last line”. The only possible way to end the poem is by not ending it.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, ekphrasis has been discussed as an intra-action involving the event, the photograph, the writer, the reader, and the poem. The underlying premise is that the act of observing is a phenomenon that involves, and affects, both the object, the apparatus, and the observing agencies. “Photograph from September 11” is an ekphrasis describing an observation of something-as-observed, and all kinds of observations and descriptions come with ethical obligations because they create agential cuts. Furthermore, in the case of ekphrastic texts representing photographs of people in vulnerable situations, there is another ethical dimension: to write without exploiting the depicted people so that they once again become means to an end. This can be done in various ways. “Photograph of September 11” borrows the representational affordances of photography by restraining and resisting the sequential, narrative impulse of language that drives the represented course of events forward. By imitating the temporalities of photography, the poem allows the victims to remain individuals and thus, to keep their integrity.

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Notes

¹ See for example Wendy Steiner (1985), Hans Lund (1992), Murray Krieger (1992), James A. W. Heffernan (1992), Scott F. Grant (1994), Tamar Yacobi (1998), Valerie Robillard (2007), Ruth Webb (2009) and Emma Tornborg (2014).

² For a discussion of narrative impulses versus arrested temporality in ekphrasis, see Steiner (1985), Heffernan (1992) and Krieger (1992).

³ With digital photography the chemical process of analog photography has been replaced with code, and there is an argument that the physical connection between the photograph and photographed, that gave it status as index, is broken. However, the truth lies a bit in between: there is no *necessary* physical relationship between a digital photograph and the reality it depicts, but when someone lifts their phone and snaps a photograph, there is still a physical connection between apparatus and object, since both analog and digital camera reacts to light: “In the CMOS (complementary metal-oxide semiconductor) sensor that sits in the majority of digital cameras, the sensor is covered with tiny light sensitive cells, each of which can measure the amount of light that falls on it. The cells act like the old photosensitive film, reacting to the light which falls on them and then reporting to the camera’s microprocessor brain” (bbc.com). Thus, there is no inherent opposition between the indexical and the digital (see for example Tom Gunning, 2004).

⁴ Intra-action is different from interaction because interaction, according to Barad, presupposes that the interactive entities existed before the interaction, whereas intra-action creates the entities involved: they

did not exist before the intra-action: “I introduce the neologism “intra-action” to signify the mutual constitution of objects and agencies of observation within phenomena (in contrast to “interaction”, which assumes the prior existence of distinct entities)” (Barad, 2007, p. 197).

⁵ As formulated in Marshall McLuhan’s often quoted sentence “the medium is the message”.

⁶ From an agential realist perspective, nothing exists outside of intra-action; there are no objects per se. Thus, the falling bodies in the photograph are observed falling bodies, and the poetic I observes bodies already observed by another agency of observation.

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Intermedial Poetics in Contemporary Anglophone Novels: Re-Negotiating Western Visual Archives

BIRGIT NEUMANN & GABRIELE RIPPL

1. The Right to See

In his study, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (1985), British Caribbean writer David Dabydeen draws attention to the multiplicity of black figures in 18th-century English paintings. Paintings by, for instance, William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds, John Hamilton Mortimer, and William Turner, are virtually populated with black figures. Typically, these paintings reduce the black figure to the status of an exotic detail (Eckstein 2005) and turn it into a fashionable commodity, i.e., a resource for gestures of superiority and related claims to 'the right to look' by white spectators. The "right to look", writes Nikolas Mirzoeff in his *Counterhistory of Visuality*, is a precondition for "claims of autonomy" and recognition in the political sphere (Mirzoeff 2011, 1). Conversely, the denial of said right amounts to a misrecognition of subjectivity and the denial of political participation.

In his literary work, Dabydeen is committed to re-vising and re-memembering Europe's visual archive and to redistributing the right to look. He seeks to bring to the fore the invisibilized memories of violent contact that are encapsulated in the presence of these black figures, while also endowing them with the capacity to see. Hence, his re-visions are directed at making readers "see[] something *other*" (Kanaan xix) and to negotiate the seemingly given and reified boundary between what is visible and what remains invisible. Dabydeen's texts, such as *A Harlot's Progress* (1999), *Turner* (1994) or *Slave Song* (1984) bring to the fore previously invisibilized experiences and activate hidden layers of meaning within actualized interpretations (cf. Neumann / Rippl 2020, 60–85). Rather than merely describing paintings, Dabydeen's texts revise and re-vision them, challenging readers to look beyond conventionalized frames and to reconsider what is being excluded. In so doing, Dabydeen's texts question how images and the archives that contain them produce visibility, suggesting that visibility is produced by an assemblage of discourses, media and norms, which are complicit with power structures.

In this endeavour, Dabydeen is not alone: His work forms part of a large body of postcolonial and transcultural literature – for instance by Teju Cole, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, Michael Ondaatje, No Violet Bulawayo, Namwali Serpell, Jane Urquhart, Zadie Smith, Aleksandar Hemon and Katie Kitamura. Their texts abound with references to images. Typically, these intermedial relations come in the form of ekphrastic descriptions of real or imagined paintings and sometimes as reproductions of paintings or photographs inserted into the text. In one way or another, they draw attention to the centrality of world-making beyond the word, while also questioning the right 'to world', which includes the right to see. Hence, the postcolonial and transcultural novels at the heart of this essay partake in the visual turn that Cara L. Lewis (2019) deems characteristic of many contemporary novels – she names, amongst others, the works of W.G. Sebald, Ali Smith, Aleksandar Hemon and Ben Lerner as examples. Yet, they give the visual turn a more specific, namely politicized twist, by highlighting the power of images to construe world-views, produce visibility and organize sociality (cf. Neumann 2015).

In what follows we will first sketch some of the characteristics of the intermedial poetics in novels and then move on to more concrete configurations, namely verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural fiction. We argue that many postcolonial and transcultural fictions use intermedial relations to enter into a critical dialogue with established visual archives and their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Following Michel Foucault (2002) and Jacques Derrida (1996), we understand the archive first and foremost in a metaphorical sense, i.e., as an epistemic and normative framework, “a historical *a priori*”, that determines the registers of sayability and the respective truth value of discursive claims. Yet, we also go beyond this understanding by arguing that the archive is not exclusively discursively structured and can therefore not be reduced to “a system [...] of enunciability” (Foucault 146). Rather, as research in the field of the visual turn (cf. Benthien/Weingart 2014) indicates, culturally normative archives are also derived from the range of available images, which establish, despite their heterogeneity, a regime of visibility. This regime of visibility perpetuates specific world-views, which are critical in structuring interpretations of reality and in determining forms of social recognition. Thus understood, the regime of visibility, prefigured by visual archives, is akin to Judith Butler’s concept of frames. Frames, according to Butler, mark “[t]he limits of [...] what can appear”; they “circumscribe the domain in which [...] certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors” (2004, xvii). Like archives, frames are always “politically saturated” (2010, 1), thus regulating forms of inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere. We suggest conceiving of the relation between literary visuality and the visual archive as interdependent and mutually transformative: While literary configurations of the visual are connected to and influenced by the archive, they are never fully determined by it. Rather, due to the liberties afforded by fiction, they can also reflect critically on the visual archive and add new perspectives and novel visibilities to it.

2. Intermediality, Ekphrasis and Verbal-Visual Configurations in the Novel

Over the last thirty years, the research fields intermediality and ekphrasis studies have become a vast and ever-expanding research field (Rippl 2015a) and intermediality has risen to pre-eminence as a central theoretical concept in many disciplines of the humanities. In the broadest sense, the term ‘intermediality’ pays tribute to the fact that media do not exist disconnected from each other; it refers to the relationships between media and is used to describe phenomena which involve more than one medium. Following W. J. T. Mitchell’s claim that there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ medium (1994, 94-95), intermediality research focuses on the connections and interactions between culturally available media and art forms. The unabating popularity and ever-increasing importance of intermediality and ekphrasis studies have also led to rich discussions amongst scholars of the Anglophone novel in general and the Anglophone transcultural novel in particular. In our digital age, many novelists employ intermedial techniques, by either combining and juxtaposing word and images or by referring to images in a plethora of ways (Brosch 2018; Yacobi 2013). An increasing number of scholars as well as novelists recognize the importance of visuality in negotiating constructions of knowledge and identity (Neumann 2015, 2023; Cole 2016). Moreover, word-image configurations have the potential to question epistemologies saturated with power relations; they help to reassess critically the working of archives and ratified narratives of the past, thus opening the way for telling other stories, stories of an unofficial nature that grant recognition of colonial pasts and what has come in their wake. An intermedial aesthetics (Neumann/Rippl 2020) is able to highlight the hegemonic political values, implicit norms and multiple forms of political appropriation words and images can carry, i. e., it showcases the fact that the meanings and social impact of words and images considerably hinge on culturally available apparatuses, institutions and discourses.

Ekphrasis in particular has caught the attention of researchers around the globe. It marks an imaginative encounter between two different media and artforms, i.e., between word and image, literature and painting, photography, sculpture, etc. As verbal renderings of visual phenomena,

ekphrases can refer to absent images or pictures reproduced in the text and take on different lengths and degrees of concreteness: they can be either long and very detailed or short and minimal, i.e., nothing but mere traces and allusions. Werner Wolf (2005) and Irina O. Rajewsky (2005, 2010) have defined ekphrasis as an intermedial phenomenon that denotes the linguistic verbalization/discursive description of or reference to another medium. Going back to Homer's evocation of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, the term ekphrasis (Greek *ek* = out and *phrazein* = tell, meaning 'to speak out') originally referred to descriptions of things, persons, places, and pictures for the purpose of *enargeia* in oration (Webb 2009). Having undergone numerous semantic changes over time, ekphrasis is today commonly understood as "*the verbal representation of visual representation*" (Heffernan 1993, 3). As second-degree representations, ekphrases thus always draw attention to themselves, their mode of representation and by implication also to their medial constructedness. Though ekphrases are very prominent in poetry, they have also played and continue to play a central and formative role in many novels. Examples of Anglophone novels that rely on intermedial techniques such as ekphrasis have become a conspicuous feature of novel production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Behluli 2023, Karastathi 2015). In the field of postcolonial and transcultural novels (Neumann/Rippl 2020) prominent examples from India, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, the United States of America and Canada are Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006), Amitav Ghosh's *The River of Smoke* (2011), Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) and *See Now Then* (2013), Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). These novels are replete with ekphrases and hence characterized by a visual writing-style. The effects of ekphrases in narrative texts are far-reaching and multiple as Liliane Louvel suggests, and fulfil referential, cultural, ideological, didactic and self-referential functions amongst others (2011, 101–133; Rippl 2015b; Behluli forthcoming). While ekphrases in narratives sometimes drive the plot forward, they typically serve to "refocus[...] attention" on a specific visual object, thus decelerating the narrative tempo, including the tempo of the reading process (Karastathi 2015, 109). As a mode of disruption, ekphrasis halts the narrative flow and produces new temporalities that undo conventional forms of plot- and action-driven storytelling, thus offering readers conceptual in-between spaces for reflection and for seeing things differently.

Anglophone novelists, whose life is shaped by experiences of diaspora, migration or transculturality, frequently explore the role of ekphrasis from a political perspective, focusing on notions of hierarchy and legitimacy in the field of cultural representation and on practices of seeing and epistemologies (Döring 2002; Neumann/Rippl 2020). Ekphrases are powerful literary devices to highlight visually encoded regimes of power, socio-political hierarchies and various inequalities that pertain to, for instance, race, gender, class and sexuality. Contemporary Anglophone postcolonial and transcultural novelists are well aware of the powerful effects ekphrasis can have and they use them in abundance. Due to their negotiation of visual practices and the power of images in our global world, ekphrasis helps to open up zones of creative transformation of established orders of the sayable and visible (Rancière 2004). As Birgit Neumann (2015) has pointed out, visual writing strategies and the combination of words and images in literary texts have the potential to create 'spaces of in-betweenness'; they complicate readers' usual way of looking at things, denaturalize cultural orthodoxies and allow for new aesthetic experiences. Due to their experimental and conceptual potential, ekphrastic descriptions can be potent means to push readers to rethink their world views by inviting them to ponder on systems of value and belief, cultural hierarchies, and socio-political realities. By investigating today's word-image configurations, by renegotiating cultural hierarchies, and finally by extending the notion of ekphrasis itself through 'politicizing' and 'transculturizing' this visual writing mode, the novelists discussed in this article do both: they open up the ekphrastic literary canon and enable negotiations of transcultural connectivity, global entanglements, cross-cultural encounters and aesthetic networks that have characterized our world in the past and today.

3. Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial and Transcultural Novels: Transcultural and Decolonial Remembering

Verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural novels come in many different forms and they fulfil a range of diverse functions (for an overview see Neumann/Rippl 2020). This multiplicity notwithstanding, there are some shared concerns and features that allow us to consider verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural fiction within a larger, comprehensive theoretical framework. This framework is grounded in the insight that postcolonial and transcultural novels are particularly interested in negotiating constructions of otherness and difference, including their effects on socio-political relations and hierarchies. As postcolonial theory has taught us, constructions of otherness and difference are never neutral; rather, within colonial and neo-colonial histories, they are complicit with power structures and can be mobilized in multiple ways to construe as well as legitimize cultural asymmetries. Importantly, this general interest in otherness and difference resonates with the aesthetics of intermediality, which, understood in a minimal sense, relies on the mingling of different media. Intermedial links have self-reflexive potential, and they throw into relief the specificities or the otherness of a distinct medium. Following the insights formulated by W. J. T. Mitchell and Tobias Döring (2002, 159), we argue that many postcolonial and transcultural novels mobilize the semiotic and material difference that intermedial relations inevitably produce and use it metonymically to probe the meanings of cultural otherness. That is to say that postcolonial and transcultural narratives activate the differences between and specificities of media to negotiate various forms of cultural otherness and to gauge how difference functions – how it is used, manipulated and misused – within larger socio-political, epistemic and affective constellations (Neumann 2015; Neumann/Rippl 2020). Implicated in a dynamic of connection and difference, intermedial relations, in particular when referring to actual images, open up a space in which politically resonant revisions of dominant visual regimes become possible. The evocation of (factual) images offers room for new interpretations and for bringing visibility to experiences as well as agents that have thus far fallen outside the culturally operative archive. Indeed, a range of postcolonial and transcultural novels – Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and *The Cat's Table* (2011), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) are prominent examples – engage critically with archives of Euro-American images and the imaginaries they imply to take issue with the kind of visibility, understood as a precondition of social recognition, they produce.

Given the potential of verbal-visual configurations to stage a battle, which flaunts media-specific capacities, it is unsurprising that intermedial constellations have frequently been interpreted as a struggle for power and dominance. The topical concept of the 'paragone' encapsulates this power-driven understanding of intermedial configurations. Mark Currie summarizes (1998, 129): "The subject is often broached in terms of a kind of power struggle between words and images, or through the broad idea that words are somehow on the retreat in an age which is dominated by images." Yet, it is important to note that, on the level of form, such intermedial revisions and re-inscriptions cannot necessarily be reduced to their antagonistic oppositional stance. Intermediality is a formal device, and form is open and ambivalent, a process of shape-giving rather than a structure or ontology, that defies closure and cannot be determined by content alone. The interplay between words and images should therefore also be considered as a genuinely pluralizing aesthetic form, striving towards exchange, transgression and energizing fusion, however conflictual said exchange might be. Intermediality thrives on various forms of attachment and constitutes a multi-layered configuration of relationality, which often dismantles facile dualisms of self and other. To give just one example: In the novel, the ekphrastic engagement with images introduces descriptive and pictorial devices into the verbal text (cf. Louvel 2011, 247), which do not so much indicate an underlying fear or ambivalence about others (Mitchell 1994, 163). Rather, on the level of form, this engagement primarily promotes and legitimizes hybridizing modes of writing. Descriptive and

pictorial strategies constitute the winking “eye of the text”, as Liliane Louvel (60) elegantly puts it, inviting readers to see through the surface of textual narratives and consider the word from the perspective of the visual, and vice versa.

Based on these remarks, intermedial aesthetics can best be understood as an open, differential form of connectivity, which brings literature into a transformative relationship with the signifying and affective potential of images (cf. Neumann 2023a, b). Irina Rajewsky rightly suggests conceiving of intermedial references as ‘as-if’ constellations. While a medium may “generate an illusion of another medium’s specific practice,” there inevitably remains an “intermedial gap” between the attempted enactment of the medium and the medium itself (Rajewsky 2005, 55). Intermediality connects literature to other media and creates multiple forms of attachment; but in so doing it also introduces friction, difference and change, which can be harnessed as a springboard for validating new visibilities.¹ Projecting the particularities of one medium onto another, verbal-visual configurations consistently fuse the sayable with the seeable. Thus, they highlight the need for pluralizing modes of signification, which escape attempts of reifying meaning and that disrupt what Rancière, in *The Future of the Image* (7), calls “the identitarian alterity of resemblance”.

In a more specific sense and with an eye to some topical concerns of post-colonial and transcultural fiction, the differential connectivity enabled by intermediality serves as an operating principle of cultural memory in general and of transcultural as well as decolonial memory in particular: References to (actual) images in the novel always entail processes of remembering, a kind of remembering that is inevitably creative and transformative, geared towards the changed needs of the present and thus thriving on complex temporal interrelations. Located within distinct cultural contexts, intermedial references remember visual artefacts to examine their meanings and impact in the present; a visual artefact thus “becomes a co-actor as past histories linger in the present moment” (Lewis 2019, 133). Rather than describing existing images, intermedial references in postcolonial and transcultural fiction examine what kind of visibility is produced by images and how the interplay between visibility and invisibility intersects with forms of recognition in the socio-political sphere. Ekphrasis as a rhetorical device opens up a conceptual space that enables transcultural memory, i.e., memory that includes the stories produced by postcolonial and transcultural lives. Thereby, it reconfigures official national memories and visual archives. A range of contemporary Anglophone transcultural novels, for instance, Taiye Selasi’s above-mentioned *Ghana Must Go*, employ ekphrasis to revisit national archives of traumatic memories that often exclude or repress subaltern memories of specific social and ethnic groups. Ekphrastic negotiations of visual works of art and artefacts bring about a transculturation of memory, i.e., a memory that travels across cultures and takes on new meaning. Time and again, such cases of ekphrasis negotiate on the one hand personal traumas concerning cultural assimilation and immigration and on the other hand crimes against humanity and violent conflicts of a political and historical nature (the Holocaust, colonial clashes, slavery, etc.). This is also the case in Aleksandar Hemon’s novel *The Lazarus Project*, which revises the official visual archive of the Chicago Police Department (see in-depth discussion below) by ekphrastically working through US-American hegemonic visuality, xenophobia and racism around 1900. Ekphrasis as a memory and memorial device transculturates remembering and considerably enlarges the presented official archive by taking the memories triggered by the police photographs on a trip through Eastern Europe.

In other novels, the transculturalization of remembering takes on more a specific form, as intermediality is used to make a step towards decolonizing the visual archive. Decolonial, in this context, references a more even distribution of agency and visibility. It embraces local and differential modes of knowing and seeing, which, to quote Mignolo and Walsh (2018), “contest the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity” (1). In a more concrete sense, one might suggest that intermedial references in postcolonial and transcultural fiction address (neo-)colonial ideologies, norms and tacit knowledges inscribed in specific artworks and explore how these ideologies affect understandings of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship in the present; they interrogate instances of historical erasure as well as ‘blind spots’ in the archive. Moreover, they also show how the

principles of inclusion and exclusion underlying the archive cause ongoing social injustices, emerging from the precarious tension between hypervisibility (for instance, of PoC in the public sphere) and invisibility (e.g., related to political participation). Such intermedial renegotiations therefore frequently respond to the norms of previously marginalized groups and their demands for the ‘right to represent’ and be represented on their own terms (see Rigney 2022, 12). This is also to say that, by means of their intermedial poetics, postcolonial and transcultural novels “create a transformed mnemonic space” (Lachmann 2008, 303), in which new voices, novel visual orders and alternative experiences can emerge. Importantly, decolonizing the visual archive in and through intermedial constellations not only involves an interrogation of western-centric forms of representation and a reconsideration of archival authority. Rather, it also often goes hand in hand with an interrogation of Euro-American notions of the archive itself, understood as exclusionary infrastructure, built on principles of “collecting, classifying, and isolating” (Cushman 116). To decolonize the archive, Cushman (117) perceptively observes, also entails a critical engagement with the epistemic structures, many of which are implicated in colonial orders, that inform them. One powerful way in which postcolonial and transcultural novels may challenge conventional notions of the visual archive is, for instance, the integration of (reproductions) of photos, which are offered as a more mobile and possibly easier accessible alternative to the institutionalized colonial and hegemonic archives.

A range of texts such as Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) and *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007), Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* (1990), as well as Katie Kitamura’s *Intimacies* (2021) are committed to re-vising and re-visioning hegemonic visual archives from an ex-centric perspective to reveal previously hidden experiences. These texts explore some of the exclusionary principles of the Euro- and American-centric archives, but they also gauge how specific visual artefacts of these archives are implicated in colonialism and neo-colonial hegemonies and accordingly privilege specific ways of knowing, being, and belonging. As our following sample interpretations of Aleksandar Hemon and Katie Kitamura’s *Intimacies* will show, these novels activate intermedial relations to subject existing visual artefacts to the transformative and differential influence afforded by literary visibility.

4. Aleksandar Hemon’s *The Lazarus Project*: Complicating Visual Archives

In our day and age, when digital media facilitate combining words and images, contemporary narratives are often characterized by new intermedial shapes that attract contemporary readers (cf. Hepburn 2010, 3; Lewis 2019, 130; Beckman and Weissberg 2013, xii–xiii; Behluli forthcoming). However, as Liliane Louvel convincingly argues, literary scholars working in the field of word-and-image studies have focused more often on painting-text relations than on photography-text interfaces (Louvel 2008, 32). It is striking that even though photography no longer comes in analogue form, the photographic image is still broadly understood as an objective documentary form. NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) are both excellent examples of how contemporary novelists interested in today’s pressing political issues negotiate this notion and employ ekphrases of photographs (which are not reproduced in their novels) to evoke a resonant scenario of the ethics of seeing, documenting and witnessing. In his travelogue *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007/2014), Cole, for instance, includes hazy and blurred photographs which serve his goal of making visible a complex network of subaltern histories, transitory experiences and liminal spaces, thus making room for creative re-visions of how politics influences the shape and content of archives. Bulawayo’s and Cole’s novels invite readers to ponder the question of who is represented and recognized and who is not.

This part of our article focusses on Aleksandar Hemon’s award-winning (autobiographical) novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008) and its cultural work of revisiting and re-negotiating visual archives. Sarajevo-born and since 1992 Chicago-based writer Hemon discusses U.S. immigration, xenophobia and anti-semitic anxieties around 1900 and 2000 and offers with his novel a prime example

of an intermedial transcultural narrative that includes ekphrases and 23 black-and-white photographs, seven of which are historical ones, originally published in the *Chicago Daily News* between 1904 and 1919. In an exchange with Cole, Hemon gives about his take on photography-text relations: "I always thought that Sebald used photographs in his books in order to expose their failure as documents. He places photos to interrupt narration so as to show that they mean nothing unless they are inside storytelling. Photographs might be self-authenticating (as Roland Barthes thought), but their authentic truth is available only in language, as practiced in narration." (Hemon in Cole 2016, 81) He goes on to ponder on how to best connect with the past: "The only way to have an organic connection with the past is by way of narration" (Hemon in Cole 2016, 81), and exactly this is the project he pursues with his novel. Hemon uses black-and-white photographs in a way that has "imprecise connections to the text" (Cole 2016, 82): "In *The Lazarus Project*, I wanted to engage the reader into confronting the history as signified by the photos in the story. And I wanted to stretch the book between the (arbitrary) poles of subjectivity and objectivity [...], so I wanted the photos to cover the same range, too – but only to complicate readers' ideas and perception" (Hemon in Cole 2016, 83). While "[t]he commonsense view would be that photography operates as a visual supplement (illustration) of the text" (Adams 2000: xxi) and that the photographic pictures reinforce the message conveyed by words, it is precisely this combination which is being subverted in *The Lazarus Project*; it is the words that try to fill the gaps in the official archive and endow the subaltern with a voice.

As the title of Hemon's novel indicates, this novelist's Lazarus project is about bringing back to life a dead person, an innocent young Jewish immigrant, refugee and 1903 pogrom survivor named Lazarus Averbuch from Kishinev (back then in the Russian Empire, today the Republic of Moldova), who was shot by the Chicago police on March 2, 1908, while trying to deliver a letter to the Chief of Police. Unlike the biblical story in the New Testament from which the novel's epigraph is taken, Hemon can of course not bring his Lazarus back to life by shouting 'Lazarus, come forth', the way Jesus did, but his narrative is dedicated to refreshing the memory of this immigrant's bleak life and unjustified brutal killing around 1900, which stands for many others. As Hemon explains, "[i]t started with two images of the dead Lazarus Averbuch sitting in a chair, being triumphantly offered by a blazingly white policeman to the American public. In 1908 these photos were supposed to show that his alleged anarchist proclivities were visible in his body and that foreign life in said body was successfully terminated by law and order." (Hemon in Cole 2016, 83) In addition to its reference to the Bible, Averbuch's first name is also an ironic reference to "The New Colossus" (1883), American poet Emma Lazarus's well-known ekphrastic sonnet. In 1903 it was engraved on a bronze plaque for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, 'Mother of Exiles', which symbolically welcomes immigrants upon their arrival:

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to land
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Hemon blends the historical events in Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century with contemporary immigration politics, value systems, patriotism, and anxieties in the USA today, for instance, when the narrator-protagonist Brik (the author's *alter ego*) claims: "The war against anarchism was much like the current war on terror – funny how old habits never die" (Hemon 2008, 42). Like Averbuch, Brik is an immigrant and diasporic person who struggles with constructing his transcultural identity. Brik's companion on his travels to Ukraine and Moldova, where he tries to find out more about Averbuch's life, is his photographer-friend Rora, who supposedly shot many of the photos included in the novel. However, already on the book's title page, directly below the novel's title and the author's name, it says: "With photographs by Velibor Bo•ovic and from the Chicago Historical Society". It is deliberately left unclear which photos are historical and which were taken by Bo•ovic (only the picture credits at the end of the text provide clarification). Like the historical photos, Rora's alias Bo•ovic's photos capture moments of the trip are black-and-white with black borders. This is reminiscent of old photo albums, an impression that is further supported by additional black pages Hemon had added to the book. The photographs fragment the text due to their position between the chapters, which demands readers to actively link them to the text. However, despite the ekphrases provided once in a while in the novel, the logical connection between text and photo is very often unclear. This is, for instance, the case with the photo on page 24 and its ekphrastic description: "Assistant chief of police Schuettler [...] carefully steps over the carmine blood puddle, shaped like an obscure ocean on the light maple floor, to land on the carpet where the young man's body lays supine" (Hemon 2008, 25). Even though the quality of the photograph's reproduction is poor, one can spot white X marks characterizing the picture as a crime scene. But neither the pool of blood nor Averbuch's dead body are visible in the photograph. Hemon's novel with its word-photography figurations and allusive, trace-like ekphrases engages in social and political discourse and invites readers to participate in meaning-making processes by contemplating possible links between words and photographs and to question commonly accepted views on these intermedial figurations.

The photographs mostly depict seemingly random scenes of American, Ukrainian and Moldovan peripatetic everyday lives: cityscapes, transitory spaces such as streets poorly lit at night, houses and interiors, portraits, police portraits, the picture of a dog, landscapes and Jewish graves. These photographic motifs remind readers of both: the state of Averbuch's liminal position and the narrator-protagonist's own state of in-between-ness. The choice of a black-and-white format for the new photographs shot by Bo•ovic historicizes many of the depicted scenes. One of the most striking features of the photographs in Hemon's novel is that they reveal as much as they hide: the grainy quality thwarts clear vision. By virtue of it being "a trace, something directly stenciled off the real" (Sontag 1979, 154), the photograph is conventionally linked to objectivity, evidence, "authentication" (Barthes 2000, 87), testimony and memory (Marsh 2003, 13). But the evidentiary nature of photographs is constantly called into question. The photographs remain mysterious and their links to the text most often ungraspable, hence establishing their meaning can never come to a final conclusion. Bo•ovic's photographs energetically defer any voyeuristic appropriation and consumption and open up different historical times. Also due to the lack of captions, it is difficult to penetrate the surface of the photographs: Who are these people that we see? Where exactly are the places that we see? In what context has a specific photograph been taken? Step by step, the dynamic interplay between narrative and photograph renders visible a complex network of subaltern histories, transitory experiences and liminal spaces, *The Lazarus Project* makes room for creative re-visions.

Putting a spotlight on the selection mechanisms that structure scopic regimes, Hemon's intermedial aesthetics creatively and subversively reimagines archives and epistemes. *The Lazarus Project* makes room for new forms of identification, which authorize minority or subaltern perspectives and offers itself as an imaginative reconfiguration of the field of American (as well as Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan) visibility by juxtaposing several temporal layers. By creating disjunctive temporalities,

the narrative brings the past into the present. The latency of a largely unresolved past conjures up the histories of racial violence that underlie American immigrant experiences of modernity and that persist in the present in various forms of socio-political inequality. In her study *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe has developed 'the wake' into a conceptual frame for analysing racism against Black life. Lending from her this important frame, Hemon's narrative can be said to also engage in 'wake work', work that deals with American racist violence and brutalities of the past that emerge in the present. Being an immigrant himself and choosing a Bosnian-American *alter ego* for his novel named Brik, who left Sarajevo in 1992 when the war broke out, Hemon negotiates "absences in the archives" and tries to make sense of the "partial truths of the archives [...] their silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance" (Sharpe 2016, 12). Like so many other postcolonial and transcultural writers, Hemon's art memorializes racist events that are not over but stand as warning signs for contemporary xenophobia, thus providing a particular intermedial way of "re/seeing, re/inhabiting and re/imagining the world" (Sharpe 2016, 22). By taking as a topic America's immigration politics and by travelling to Averbuch's native land, Hemon helps to 're-write' the official police archive by examining the archive of American fears of foreigners and anarchists. Hemon's creative intermedial intervention thus problematizes the official visual archive and its underlying political orders. His intermedial narrative with its interspersed photographs and ekphrases is suspicious of official archives and their power of documentation, thus highlighting verbally and discursively that which is omitted, and adding pictures and stories that are not stored in the official archives.

5. Katie Kitamura's *Intimacies*: Countering Mnemonic Invisibilities

Katie Kitamura's novel *Intimacies* features a female protagonist, serving as the auto-diegetic narrator, who has left New York behind to take up a position as a staff interpreter at the Court in The Hague. Eventually, she is required to interpret for a former West African president, "one of the higher profile cases at the Court" (Kitamura 145), who is accused of crimes against humanity. Terms referencing the president's alleged crimes, such as "*cross-border raid, mass grave, armed youth*" (117), pervade the novel; much like ghosts they demand recognition, but ultimately defy interpretation, pushing the translator to the point at which "[l]anguage loses its meaning" (116). What, *Intimacies* explores, are the cognitive and affective costs shouldered by the translator who is required "not simply to state or perform but to repeat the unspeakable" (186). How, the novel asks, does the repetition of the unspeakable affect the translator's subjectivity? As the novel, step by step, foregrounds the emotional burden of interpretation, it raises some uncomfortable questions concerning the (in-)visibility of those who sustain political and social life in the West. Ekphrasis, we argue, becomes a central device to counter the invisibilities and invisibilizations integral to western socio-political orders, including the institutions and infrastructures that support them.

From the novel's beginning, the narrator is presented as a rootless subject; her family, as stressed several times, is of non-western origin and she, according to one character, does "not truly" belong to "the West" (211). She uneasily inhabits the shifting places between cultures, not knowing what or where home is: Following her father's death, her mother moved to Singapore, and she "was happy to be away from New York", a city that had "become disorienting" to her (1). Terms indicating alienation and non-belonging abound on the first pages, and the fact that the protagonist remains nameless throughout adds to the sense of strangeness that the opening establishes. And yet, this set of affects is soon superseded by a second one, centred around different forms of intimacy. Indeed, the words "intimate", "intimacy" and "intimacies" pervade Kitamura's novel, navigating, as they do, the intersections between privacy, proximity and desire. In the novel, intimacies are evoked to describe friendships, the desire for closeness, the longing for quietness and the experience of trust. But throughout, as if to refer back to the strangeness that the novel thrives on from its beginning, intimacies also mark unintentional and even unwanted forms of closeness, such as the overhearing of conversations, offensive touches, and disturbing revelations. Intimacies frequently turn into intimidations.

Intriguingly, in Kitamura's novel, different forms of intimacies are not only a topical concern but also serve as a method and organizing principle for linking seemingly different historical experiences and distant spaces. As a matter of fact, the novel resonates with Lisa Lowe's (2015) historiographic take on intimacies, which she uses as a methodology – a means of reading the archive against the grain – to bring to the fore unexpected and unseen connections between colonialism, slavery, imperial trade and western liberalism. It is at this point that the novel's ekphrases become critical as they make readable the histories that lie hidden beneath the surface. The novel uses ekphrastic devices to expose and counter socio-politically unquestioned, at times even structurally supported invisibilities. This intervention manifests nowhere more pronouncedly than in the narrator's recollection of an exhibition opening at the Mauritshuis, a well-known art museum in The Hague. The museum, a major Dutch heritage site, famously houses the Royal Cabinet of Paintings, which contains many famous works of the so-called Dutch Golden Age, by, for instance, Johannes Vermeer, Rembrandt and Hans Holbein the Younger. In a central scene, the female protagonist observes the exhibition's visitors, many of whom are "dressed in designer brands" and gather around the bust of Johan Maurits. The expenses that have gone into the designer clothes clash uneasily with the narrator's claim that Maurits "founded the museum with a fortune built from the transatlantic slave trade and the expansion of Dutch Brazil." (Kitamura 124) According to the narrator, the marble bust, ordered in 1664 by Maurits himself and produced by the Flemish sculptor Bartholomeus Eggers, depicts the former "slave trader and colonialist" in a highly triumphalist manner: "Maurits appeared particularly pompous in this rendering by Bartholomeus Eggers, with his jowls and pursed lips and ornate dress. He stared into space, one hand splayed across his front." (124) In what follows, Kitamura uses the space provided by the narrative to remember the transatlantic slave trade and to highlight the extent to which Europe's wealth, its institutions and cultures, relies on the exploitation of slaves, i.e., the turning of Black persons into commodities ruthlessly harnessed to maximize profit.

It is important to note that this act of decolonial re-membering not only manifests on the level of content but also on that of form. The ekphrastic engagement with the bust builds on descriptive and reflective devices, which do not feed into the progressive, sequential temporality of narrative. More specifically, the description of and reflection on the bust interrupt the flow of the narrative, "caught", according to Peter Brooks, "in an irreversible and ever-accelerating process of change" (136), and creates a non-progressive temporality. Arguably, the progressive temporality enshrined in linear narrative has been central to forging notions of progress and development, underlying western concepts of modernity. To be sure, we are not claiming that there is any intrinsic, causal connection between narrative and western modernity; yet, as many have argued before us, (linear and chronological) narrative promotes a specific kind of temporality, which is complicit with configurations of modern progress. Postcolonial scholars in particular (see Chakrabarty 2000, 2009; Cheah 2016) have highlighted that the teleological time of western modernity made possible different, but inter-related forms of "colonial violence" and "capitalist exploitation" (Cheah 2016, 12). Against this backdrop, Kitamura's ekphrasis-cum-reflection can be understood as a valorization of an alternative, non-sequential temporality that resists notions of progress to make room for previously marginalized and ignored histories of violence (see Baumbach/Neumann 2023). In other words, the temporality produced by the ekphrasis constitutes an intervention into dominant temporal regimes, including the contemporary 'economy of attention' and attendant forms of overlooking, ignoring and forgetting. Such forgetting and indifference seem to be omnipresent, as the narrator makes clear. In her characteristically neutral tone, she notes: "Although the bust was surrounded by guests, no one seemed to pay it any mind, the history present but unconsidered. As I watched, a man in a suit yawned and brushed against the bust before righting himself again." (Kitamura 124)

Very much in the sense of Jacques Rancière's *Figures of History* (2014), then, Kitamura's novel *Intimacies* activates ekphrases to address erasures and gaps in the archive, thus renegotiating the lines between visibility and invisibility. In his essay "The Threshold of the Visible", Rancière states: "If

there is a visible hidden beneath the invisible, it's not the electric arc that will reveal it, save it from non-being, but the *mise en scène* of words, the moment of dialogue between the voice that makes those words ring out and the silence of images that show the absence of what the words say." (44) It is precisely the "dialogue between the voice" and "the silence of images" that, in the novel, makes it possible to reinscribe into the western cultural spaces forgotten histories and reveal connections, the titular 'intimacies', between seemingly disparate spaces, i.e., the museum and slave plantations in Dutch Brazil. Indeed, such decolonizing remembrance enables what Cardina and Rodrigues call "mnemonic transitions", marking shifts in memory cultures that are directed towards more inclusive forms of representation as well as greater epistemic and social justice. The narrator's insistent demand to remember the slave trade and to see it as integral to Europe's 'civilization' therefore also ties in with the novel's main topic: It takes issue with the international division of labour, including its continuous processes of invisibilization, asking readers to acknowledge the persons and procedures upon which western wealth and life-styles rely. The central right pertaining to privileged people consists in the right to ignore what or who lies hidden beneath the visible – and it is this right that *Intimacies* energetically contests.

6. Coda

According to Mirzoeff, "the visibility of visibility is an index of crisis" (6); following the literary examples, we would argue that the visibility of visibility as achieved through intermediality is an index of and precondition for change. Intermediality makes room for re-membering and reform through changing, from within, those forms that underlie and possibly sustain collectivities (cf. Kornbluh 2019). Intermediality offers ways of re-membering that reach out to others, calling for the acceptance of other visions, without glossing over plurality and conflict (Neumann 2023b). Intermediality does important cultural work as it has the potential to decolonize and transculturize western visual archives and enable mnemonic transition to other, more socially just narratives of the past. Ekphrastic negotiations of visual works of art and artefacts in particular, bring about a transculturation of memory, i.e., a memory that travels across cultures and takes on new meaning according to the changed needs of the present. Ekphrasis as a memorial device transculturates re-membering and considerably complicates colonial and other hegemonic visual archives. Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as well as Kitamura's *Intimacies* both negotiate the relation between literary visibility and the visual archive as interdependent and mutually transformative. Their word-image configurations are connected to and influenced by official visual archives, but they are not fully determined by them. In fact, thriving on the liberties of fiction, they reflect critically on visual archives, adding fresh perspectives and novel visibilities to them, and thus offer themselves as complementary or even counter-archives.

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Notes

¹ Irina Rajewsky understands intermedial references as 'as-if' constellations. While a medium may "generate an illusion of another medium's specific practice," there inevitably remains an "intermedial gap" between the attempted enactment of the medium and the medium itself (Rajewsky 2005, 55).

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Disjunctive Pronouns: On Multimodal Analysis of Digital Poetry*

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Digital poems are genre-mixing entities that raise questions about how to discuss boundaries and combinations of genres, media, and art forms. When is a boundary stable, and how can mixtures be described and analyzed? It is not only relevant to *describe* heterogeneous media configurations and define what they are, but also to ask what they contribute to when it comes to meaning, content and semantics. In this regard, I will use the theory and conceptual framework of Swedish media theorist Lars Elleström (2010) regarding multimodality and mixed modalities. I will argue for the productive use of this conceptual framework in analysis, thus avoiding way too complex terminology, image/text dichotomies, etc. Furthermore, I will define when a work is what I call distinctly multimodal and should therefore be analyzed using these multimodal analytical tools. In the following, I will provide a brief introduction to intermediality theory and, consequently, argue for the fruitfulness of multimodal analysis of digital poetry.

“Intermediality” is a concept with a complex history that, among other things, builds upon the so-called interart studies, where different art forms are compared and examined to understand how they fundamentally differ from each other. One of the most influential historical theorists within interart studies is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who reflects on the differences between the two art forms in his work “Laocoön or On the Borders of Painting and Poetry” from 1766. He concludes that poetry (literature) and art (primarily painting) are fundamentally different. Poetry is temporal, whereas art is spatial. Therefore, poetry can describe actions, while art can only depict objects. Art can only depict the same space at once, while poetry can have a plot by allowing different parts to develop alongside each other in a progression.

The concept of intermediality today signals, through its prefix “inter,” that there is something between two media – and that these two therefore differ from each other. In the article “Border Talks” from 2010, Irina Rajewsky describes how one can avoid viewing two entities (media) as essences even though there is an “inter” between them. Media (here understood as “art forms”) and their definitions and boundaries are historically contingent and discursively conditioned. However, they become so thoroughly stabilized that we can still talk about our intuitive understanding of what the different media encompass and how they differ from each other. So even if we eliminate the essentialist aspect, we can still discuss similarities and differences between different media (art forms).

Rajewsky has established a conceptual distinction between media combinations and intermedial references. Media combinations are the result of a process where at least two conventional media forms are combined (Rajewsky, 2005 51–52). Media combinations can be integrated to such an extent that they become independent art forms (for example, films that combine visuals, sound, and storytelling, or operas that blend music, text, and scenography) where their multimodal basis is their specificity. On the other hand, if there is an intermedial reference, it does not involve a combination of multiple media, but rather a process where a singular medium refers to other media by acting “as if” it were a different medium – hence the imitation. A conventional and distinct media type can

thematize, produce, or specifically imitate other media types, but through the use of its own media-specific qualities. For example, one can think of literature that uses cinematic techniques such as cuts, zooms, fading, etc. Regarding media combinations, Rajewsky herself asks:

[O]ne might ask to what extent, in the case of so-called intermedia – including for example visual poetry and corporate logos – one can in fact speak of a combination of different medial forms of articulation, since the constitutive medial forms become *quasi* inseparable. This extreme outer pole of media combinations concerns phenomena in which individual media or their material manifestations – such as word and image – become inextricably bound to, or even “merged” with, one another, and as such are simultaneously and oscillatingly present (Rajewsky 2005, 52)

Rajewsky argues that visual poetry is an extreme form of media combination where words and images are inseparable. However, if we take an emblematic example of visual poetry/concrete poetry like Reinhard Döhl’s “Apfel” from 1965, it becomes clear that one should perhaps apply Rajewsky’s distinctions in a different way by considering visual poetry as an imitation rather than a combination of media.



The work consists of the word “Apfel”, repeated until a formation of words depicting an apple is formed. Among all the words, there is a single “Wurm”, a small worm that has gnawed its way into the apple. The reason I deviate from Rajewsky’s differentiation is that the work does nothing but use the art form of poetry: letters on a page. The difference is that it is not the medium’s range of materials that has changed, but the mode of reception that has changed so that there is a registration of the visual expression of the words rather than a semantic decoding. Words are always visual, but here we have words that act “as if” they were a picture – hence the imitation. Apfel clearly does not meet Lessing’s old definition of poetry. The work is not time-based, but rather spatial – you look at it as you look at a picture. If I, along with Rajewsky, insist that the definition and delimitation of art forms from other art forms are always contingent and discursively conditioned, then we see here an interesting example of a work that forces the boundaries between established art forms to become elastic, or one could also argue that a work like Apfel cements a boundary between poetry and visual art by insisting on saying: “I am a poem and I use the materials that poems have at their disposal – even though I cling right up to the “boundary” of the domain of visual art”. In the end, it becomes a question of institutionally imposed labels: the designation of a material as a poem or a picture.

Apple is a minimalist work – also at the level of intermediality. Because in the following, we will look at an example of digital poetry that has a completely different form of complexity and that combines freely with its use of words, sound, formations, and movement. Lars Elleström has systematized a characterization of media through their modal composition. In the following, I will explain his theory and, at the same time, reflect on the theory as an analytical tool, through its use in a concrete example of analysis.

Intermedial relations and modalities of media

Lars Elleström argues that it is a problem for intermediality research that there has not been a real effort to investigate what a medium is. He points out that media intersect more than they distinguish themselves from each other. One may never stop talking about media boundaries, but his theory is a genuine attempt to transcend them. Elleström aligns himself with W.J.T. Mitchell and his dictum that “all media are mixed media” (2005), but firstly Elleström does not see the historical relations between media as power struggles in the same way as Mitchell, and secondly, he incorporates modality theory. Elleström starts from the bottom, so to speak. Instead of looking at existing media and what they consist of, he examines the existence of basic modalities and interrogate how they are mixed in individual media. The underlying assumption is that all media share a limited number of modalities: semiotic, spatiotemporal, material, and sensory modalities. This conceptual framework makes it impossible, for example, to think of the relation between the verbal and the visual as a dichotomy as it has traditionally been conceived in interart studies (as exemplified by Lessing’s *Laocoön*). Elleström describes how it is assumed that the materiality of literature oscillates between materiality and immateriality, but he emphasizes that the category of materiality itself is unsustainable because it does not consider the fact that different art forms consist of completely different materials, such as language, sounds, and even the immaterial. Sounds are closely related to the sensory, and although language is also a kind of sound, it must primarily be understood in a semiotic context. Elleström further points out that the most common misunderstanding in intermedial comparisons is to confuse the visual with the iconic. The visual pertains to using a particular sense, while the iconic is semiosis based on similarity (which may not necessarily be visible).

Furthermore, Elleström establishes a distinction between basic media and qualified media. For example, a pop song is a qualified medium that includes two basic media: verbal text and organized non-verbal sound. One can discuss whether it is possible to define digital poetry as a qualified medium. Due to the diversity of works, I will refer to them as mixtures of basic media and not attempt to solidify the boundaries for a definition of digital poetry as a qualified medium. I will use Elleström’s model as a starting point for analysis. This means that I not only consider the line of thinking as a reasonable approach to genre and conceptual clarification, but also attempt to show how the model can be used as an analytical tool. I will use the model in a work analysis where I continuously define the different categories and examine how they can open up an understanding of the work’s strategies that go beyond a definition of modes and their mixtures, by also pointing out the effect of these strategies.

Analysis of Digital Poem

The Swedish multidisciplinary artist Johannes Heldén released the digital text work “*Väljarna/Elect*” in 2008. It is a work that combines images, sound, text, movement, and interaction. When the work is activated, it starts with white words on a black background. It is a small amount of text without linear fixation, consisting of the words: “They do not pursue us in dreams // flickering light // distant lights // for the first time real horror // the flocks of birds // move towards darkness // the distant lights¹.”

The formation of words on the page functions as a kind of enjambement with meaningful effects. There are long spaces between the words and insertions on the page: the English phrase “distant lights” breaks with the Swedish text, creating an abrupt reading experience and a sense of fragmented uncertainty. The text is time-bound, so there is not enough time to dwell on it before it fades away. Then, a rectangular frame with pale gray, dappled clouds slowly spread and reveals a black, worn-out tree. It is digitally rendered but naturalistic in its expression. It sways ever so slowly. A drone-like electronic music quietly emerges, creating a somewhat unsettling, threatening atmosphere along with the tree. Above the tree, in a kind of mirroring formation, the shadow of writing

appears, but it is unreadable. After a few seconds, silhouettes of birds begin to fly out between the branches of the tree.



Väljarna/ Elect

One quickly discovers that it is possible to “catch” the birds with the cursor, and then they disappear in favor of a small piece of text that appears below the tree with white letters on a black background. Gradually, one can also click on the text above the tree to make it readable. The order in which the text appears is random because the relationship between each piece and a bird is arbitrary. The amount of text is finite, that is, limited, but there are individual snippets of text that can only stand one at a time, so your access to the work will always be particular in the sense that some text disappears when you want something else to appear. It is a parallel rather than a hierarchical linear expression, and it creates an ambiguity that is reinforced by an ambiguity in the narrative voice. There are truncated sentences with an “I,” a “we,” a “he,” and as mentioned, English statements mixed with Swedish here and there. There are different levels of epistemic competence, for example, an extremely self-referential narrator in a single sequence called “I know everything that can ever happen.” The random order of acquisition entails an uncertainty in the utterance of pronouns. It is not known to whom “they” refer when taken out of context, “They do not pursue us in dreams,” “The distant lights,” and “It”: “It grows quickly now, twines around his legs, knocks him down.” The: “I see it in the corner of my eye and it scares me senseless.” A snippet of a sentence can be: “Others grow too fast and die of exhaustion,” but who are these “others” that the comparison assumes? One lacks the preceding elements that the existence of a comparison necessarily designates. Pronouns (or shifters in a broader sense) can be incomprehensible when standing alone. However, the polyphonic and hybrid text can be said to be categorizable into thematic clusters and different referential levels (i.e., from the self-referential to the referring narrative). The work revolves thematically around the forest and horror: “And he rages, sinks into the ground,” “And stumbles out into the tall grass,” “the voice on the saw blade,” “body parts in the mountainside,” “the knife in the inner pocket,” “drowned in mud,” “all the ice crystals” “the branches of the trees,” “the darkening forest.”

There is an apocalyptic atmosphere that is explicitly expressed when the word “fimbulwinter” appears: Fimbulwinter is in Norse mythology the three-year-long ice winter that heralds Ragnarok. This theme plays exemplarily together with the work’s tree, clouds, birds, and music. But the eeriness in the text moves into other environments, which at the same time are mood breaks because of sharp scene changes when “it” enters an apartment. Thus, environmental breaks are established by moving

from room to room (from a cabin in the woods to an apartment). Other spaces are constituted in a whole, but surreal ways when, for example, a “laughing monkey” appears in writing. It is an absolute break with the Nordic forest with spruces, ice, and abandoned buildings. It is an anthropomorphization to make the monkey smile, and it becomes cute, but also demonic with its smile, so one can almost hear evil monkey screams on an imaginary auditory level that is isolated from the sound image on the material level of the work.

Elleström’s four modalities used in a work analysis

Elleström operates with four base modalities: material, sensory, spatio-temporal, and semiotic modalities. The material modality is defined by Elleström as the medium’s latent physical interface. This means whether the medium’s material is 2D or 3D, whether it is human body, whether it is static or not, whether it is sound waves or laser projections. In practice, it is impossible to separate, but still important to distinguish between the material and its perception. “Väljarna” as a work has a materiality with moving images and sound waves. The screen is two-dimensional – it has width and height – but already through interaction, the mouse function, etc., the appropriation extends into a spatial and temporal dimension. This concerns very basic phenomenological experiences of the computer medium.

The sensory modality is the physical and mental action of perceiving a medium’s interface with one’s senses (Elleström, 2010, 17). Normally we talk about the five human senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, but according to Elleström, three more must be mentioned: sensory data originating from objects, phenomena, etc. that cannot be encapsulated in isolation without a perceiving and interpreting agent. These three are internal creations: feeling a sculpture even though seeing it, hearing music and speech, it has much to do with an internal balance, feeling the rhythm in the body, etc. One imagines images when reading, even though they differ from the appearance of letters on the page. Think about how in “Väljarna” I see and hear the cute and demonic monkey at the same time independently of (or rather as a contrast to) the work’s materiality (its flatness, sound, and images).

As mentioned, the four modalities are difficult to separate, and examples of the sensory modality will appear in the following when I analyze the music and the ways in which the tree is temporal, their ways of creating atmosphere and space, as well as the text’s way of establishing space, and soundscapes on the material level of the work. In the interaction with the work, the birds become tools – buttons that can be pressed to bring forth sentences instead of images in themselves. At the same time, they are of course also bird pictures that, together with the black tree, create atmosphere and evoke associations and dissociations along with the words. But this is a good example of how the interface and the work, so to speak, have merged – in the digital realm, links and buttons are symbolic signs – and with the birds, we see how what needs to be done with the work is a part of the work itself.

The constitution of time and space at different levels

The spatiotemporal modality is an important tool for analyzing “Väljarna”. Elleström describes how cognitive factors cause all media to be presented with both spatial and temporal qualities. Spatiotemporal perception can be said to consist of four dimensions: width, height, depth, and time. A photograph’s physical interface only has two dimensions: width and height. A sculpture has three material dimensions, all spatial: width, height, and depth. Dance has all four dimensions – a dance performance has a beginning, an extension, and an end – and therefore exists in time, while a photograph just exists. You don’t miss anything if you close your eyes for a moment – you miss something with a dance performance. Media that lack the fourth dimension, time, are static. Media that incorporate the dimension of time in their physical manifestation can have:

- fixed sequentiality (moving images and recorded music, such as the music in *Väljarna* that cannot be manipulated)
- partially fixed sequentiality (e.g. hypertext and video game music – this is what is happening with the text in *Väljarna* where there is interaction, but the text moves independently of you in chunks).
- unfixed sequentiality (mobile sculptures, improvised music, live, televised performance).

Elleström describes how media can be spatial, and the most fundamental form of spatiality is found at the level of material modality: we have physical width, height, and depth. However, this is not the only form of spatiality because he believes that our perception largely functions spatially. Abstract concepts and experiences of time also have spatial characteristics (Elleström 2010, 20). So the virtual space is also important: images and photographs are flat but give the impression of depth. Narratives in text provide a “real” but virtual world that one can navigate. Just as the concept of virtual space, there must be a discussion about virtual time. Some media have physical interfaces that are not temporal, but all media are realized in time. One can think of a static image with motifs indicating a time, for example, a before and an after the current configuration. Written text on paper obviously does not possess any temporal quality other than what you yourself evoke and control, unless one wants to speak of rhythm as indicating tempo, but of course, text on the referential level can possess temporality – narration necessarily unfolds in time. In “*Väljarna*”, the temporality of the text is complex. On its material level, it has a partially fixed sequentiality – you are not controlled in your reading order of lines, but on the other hand, you do not determine each time what you want to read and what remains. You barely have time to register the sentence “Body Parts in the Rock Wall” before it disappears again. This contributes to uncanniness on a sensory level. The semantics of words are thus influenced by the way we acquire them. Like when you see a short clip of an image in a film and do not have the opportunity to stare until you have understood, dismissed, or mentally disarmed the motif. In some sequences in “*Väljarna*”, the writing appears letter by letter, as if seeing the writing as it is being written. Thus, one is fixed in the sequentiality – your reading speed is controlled. There is a special kind of temporality on the material level. In one case, there is a sort of coincidence between this level and the referential one. The sentence: “it’s growing fast now, winding around his legs, tearing him down” moves at a writing speed, approximately in my reading order. It feels as if the movement on both levels is in sync because they both have progress. “*Väljarna*” deals with the phenomenon of time on a referential, thematic level with some abstract and aphoristic sequences such as: “everything exists infinitely” and “the curve of time is soft”. A statement about a soft curve of time can seem like a colossal shift in levels if one has just read about rust on a saw blade. Any associative, metonymic or thematic connections between statements are nullified when the display of sentences has a random sequentiality. The statement about a soft curve of time induces dizziness, a distortion of the metaphor of time as a curve. Can one then pull on the curve, stretch it like a rubber band, or is it soft in a way that allows one to make holes in it? The image must stand alone because you do not dare to trust a connection to other semantic statements in the work. The appropriation of words, with the abrupt sequences as mentioned, can give the sense of lacking intentionality, but conversely, the work plays with other mood-enhancing techniques that establish a sophisticated form of appeal. I am thinking here of the other basic media that constitute the work: music and images. Visually, the work is dominated by the digital tree that moves ever so slowly. One could say that it is a stagnant, almost cyclical form of movement fixed in its sequentiality (if one can even speak of such). In that sense, the tree exists on the same temporal modal level as the auditory mood creator of the work: the music. It is, of course, temporal, but it resists its own temporality and establishes an atmospheric underlying mood with its minimal, drone-like sound. Rather than a temporal progression, it is a kind of trembling, and a potential sense of progression is constantly annulled because in the background of the sound image, a careless oscillation between two deep tones is hinted at. In a sequence in the text, there may be a reference to the work’s own music: “like believing that the noise does not hold any melodies, because it does. They are there, and they are

more than can be counted.” The music precisely allows for a multitude of virtual spatial openings and progressions. The minimal is simultaneously an opening and a closure. The interaction between the tree and the sound creates a specific mood. Even though the sound does not mimic the “sound of a tree,” they would not be able to do without each other. The reason why there is always music for silent films is that moving images without sound appear extremely ghostly. Movement is friction and friction produces sound. The fact that the artwork actually has a slightly ghostly atmosphere is due to the deep underlying tone of the music, the gloomy, gray-toned colors, and parts of the text. When I analyze how the music and images function as emotional sutures – as something that establishes a kind of coherence and address despite the rejecting gesture in the text, the question arises of whether these can be said to “fill in the gaps” in the text. In “Väljarna”, there is the following sentence: “Now, now it enters my apartment and moves towards me.” When we suddenly find ourselves in an apartment we have never been in before and the sentence is torn out of any context, how do we contextualize the “it” in the sentence? When the text consists of disjunctive pronouns, can image and sound create a context that perhaps does not close, but delimits the space of meaning? A space of meaning that otherwise stands wide open with the use of, for example, “it” or “that”.

The space of the sky is a completely different place – The semiotic modality

In *Väljarna*, I also find examples of words “escaping” from image and music. To nuance these effects, I will briefly introduce the last of Elleström’s modalities: the semiotic modality. This modality is divided into Peirce’s well-known triad, which distinguishes between symbolic, iconic, and indexical signs. Elleström emphasizes that the semiotic nature of media is immensely complex, but there are inevitably basic semiotic differences between, for example, written text and a moving image (Elleström 2020, 22–23). When the words in “*Väljarna*” create spatial environments independent of the image and music, we see a difference between the effects of the iconic and the symbolic in reception. It is interesting how the words of the work (as symbolic signs) interact with the visual and the auditory, but can also create their own distinct visual spaces as a contrast: “See a pale yellow sun rise, a supernova explode, and the pupil expand”; from the realistic, picturesque scene with a pale yellow sun rising, to a supernova (a star much, much larger than the sun) exploding, and then down to the relatively small pupil expanding slightly. It is a small reaction to a supernova explosion. One is the colossal leaps in sizes for expansion here in the imaginary space, but imagine if, after the text about the supernova, you jump to a self-referential text sequence about the birds that we are trying to catch. From abstract, gigantic events in the sphere outside the space of the sky, to your movement right now with a computer cursor capturing a small, black pixel bird that produces a word. The birds become buttons while also being mood-setting birds, because they constantly oscillate between being iconic and symbolic signs. But, of course, they are not symbolic in the same way as words. When Elleström rejects the verbal-visual dichotomy, it is because the verbal has a “body” that is visual or auditory – but it does not mean that everything becomes the same. Text is still text with its own effects – and image and sound as well. When I examine configurations of space in the work, the point is precisely that there is a difference in the auditory, semantic, and visually figurative representation of it. The small, black letters on a grayish background send the recipient (imaginary) visual references to supernova explosions, and we must once again think of the smiling monkey who visually and audibly places itself in an imaginary place. It seems to be an intended effect in the present work that we both scratch the surface of the “concrete” material by interacting with the flying birds and physically sense the rapidly moving letters *and* get thrown into space and apartments, as well as having the imaginary sound effects laugh alongside the actual digital drone sound.

Conclusion

The modal composition is located at the level of meaning formation. With Elleström’s model, I have a conceptual framework and a conceptual mindset that I can use in analyzing genre-challeng-

ing works. I don't expect the genre of digital poetry to stabilize and become a qualified medium in the same way as, for example, film. With digital poems (and much other contemporary art), the bag of modal blocks is shaken every time. While the modal composition of well-established art forms can be said to largely reside at the level of established conventions, distinctly multimodal works have modal compositions that include distinct and "new" elements in the appropriation of the work, which have a significant impact on meaning formation and therefore require a non-trivial effort from the recipient (Aarseth, 1997, 1). The modalities must therefore be analyzed as more and different than just the genealogical characteristics of the work's genre because they have not (yet) been internalized. In other words, the modal composition belongs to the level of meaning formation. The modalities and their effects are functionalized and externalized in the sense that in encountering the work, they are experienced as if they are on the "outside." They are experienced as more than just 'being there'. Therefore, it makes sense to integrate a sensitivity to this composition and its effects as part of one's analysis.

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Notes

* In Memory of Lars Elleström (1960–2021).

¹ My translation from Swedish.

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The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and ‘Let It Go’

SIGNE KJAER JENSEN

Abstract: In this essay, I use the song ‘Let It Go’ from *Frozen* as a steppingstone for addressing song and animated musical film as combined media, or rather *integrations*, and, based on the models put forward by Lars Elleström, propose a framework for discussing different kinds of synchronic intermediality. I propose that when analysing synchronic intermediality, we need to consider (at least) three types of combination: 1) combination of modalities (understood as formal structures framing the content), 2) combination of qualified aspects (understood as conventions of media products, herein those aspects tied to media representation), and 3) combination of semiotic content.

Keywords: intermediality, song, musical, combination, *Frozen*

Since its release in 2013, Disney’s *Frozen*, particularly the main character Elsa, has attracted considerable popular and academic attention. Elsa has been analyzed from a feminist or queer perspective, with scholars discussing the degree of feminist or queer potential (Myren-Svelstad; Davis; Bunch; Whitfield), or arguing against such potential, emphasising the inherently conservative traits of the film or the missed opportunities to present truly subversive heroines (Llompart and Brugué; Halsall). As a Disney Princess musical, loosely based on “The Snow Queen” by H.C. Andersen, *Frozen* has also been analyzed as an adaptation (Llompart and Brugué; Halsall; Myren-Svelstad). Remarkably few, however, have paid any sustained attention to the musical qualities (beyond the lyrics) of the film’s greatest hit song ‘Let it Go’.¹ Song, like animation, is inherently intermedial, often referred to as a combined medium. In this essay, I put aside the critical and ideological discussions of *Frozen* and Elsa and focus on the *intermedial* and *musical* construction of Elsa in her key song ‘Let It Go’. In doing so, I use ‘Let It Go’ as a steppingstone for addressing song and animated musical film as combined or integrated media and to propose a framework for discussing different kinds of synchronic intermediality, based on the models put forward by Lars Elleström.

1. Intermediality: Basic concepts and categorisations

Intermediality is still a problematic area with a lack of consensus concerning terminology. Several influential frameworks and classification systems for understanding intermedial phenomenon have been proposed, amongst others by Werner Wolf, Irina Rajewsky, Hans Lund, Claus Clüver and Lars Elleström (“The Modalities of Media”; “The Modalities of Media II”). Common to these various systems is an understanding of intermediality as a medial phenomenon where different types of communication or art meet, directly or indirectly, breaking down media borders and creating new expressive constellations. While the precise definitions vary between approaches, a rough division can be made between two different kinds of intermedial encounters, 1) intermedial integrations or combinations (in Wolf’s terminology referred to as ‘overt’ or ‘direct’ intermediality (39–40)), where

two or more media forms, such as moving images and music, are combined or integrated into a new media product, such as a film, and 2) intermedial transformations or transpositions (referred to as ‘covert’ or ‘indirect’ intermediality in Wolf’s terminology (41–43) such as adaptation or musicalized literature. Rajewsky works with a third category titled ‘intermedial reference’ in which “the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means” (53), which is partly or fully covered in the transformation category of the other systems mentioned.

Starting in 2010, and repeating it as late as 2021, Elleström has argued that basic intermedial research is hindered by a lack of clear definitions of ‘medium’ and of the media types compared within intermedial frameworks (“The Modalities of Media” 11–12; “The Modalities of Media II” 5–8). As a response to this problem, Elleström has put forth a comprehensive media model meant to aid in discussing similarities and differences among media, while also serving as a basis for discussing the two overarching categories of integration and transformation. In Elleström’s framework, the two types of intermedial encounters mentioned above are maintained, but Elleström further divides media transformation into ‘media representation’ and ‘transmediation’. Media representation refers to cases of “a medium representing another medium of a different kind” (Elleström, “The Modalities of Media II” 81). In other words, in media representation, another type of medium is evoked, often through a verbal reference or through the representation of some formal characteristics of said medium, e.g., if a story in a book mentions someone painting a picture, or if a poem is structured like a musical sonata. Transmediation, on the other hand, refers to cases where the semiotic content, i.e., ideas, narrative or story content, is transferred, the most common case of transmediation being adaptations.

Despite being mainly interested in the synchronic media relations in this paper, all of these categories of media relations become relevant when considering the intermedial architecture of *Frozen* and ‘Let It Go’. Besides the transmedial relation between H.C. Andersen’s source text and *Frozen*, one might also consider the relation between ‘Let It Go’ and *Frozen* as a media transformation. As noted by Ryan Bunch (96), the sequence of ‘Let It Go’ feels somewhat like a music video. The sequence begins with a ‘cut’ to a scenic view simulating an extreme long shot of a snowy mountain, combined with a simple, high-pitched melody played by a piano and the ‘magical’ sound of chimes. A small dot, unidentifiable at first, shows us Elsa moving up the mountain. Over the first eight measures of the music, the ‘camera’ gradually pans and zooms in on Elsa, and she starts singing. The sequence ends with Elsa shutting a balcony door in her ice palace, shutting out the camera and viewer, while the music dies out. Both the beginning and the end of this sequence clearly demarcate it from the rest of the film. Furthermore, this sequence was published on YouTube by Walt Disney Animation Studios on the 6. Dec. 2013 – nine days after the official American release of the film on 27. Nov., and well before the film had finished its worldwide release. According to IMDB, *Frozen* was not released in countries like Sweden, China, or Japan until well into 2014 (whether or not these countries were able to view the YouTube video at this point, is unclear) (“Frozen: Release Info”). Many audiences will therefore have had access to the YouTube version of the song *before* they watched the full film, and with 850.713.634 showings (at the time of writing, 13 July 2023), ‘Let It Go’ have achieved a semi-autonomous status *as* a music video. While I believe it is *generally* unproductive to consider films to be a *combined* medium due to the deep perceptual and interpretive integration of auditive and visual media, ‘Let It Go’ constitutes a border case where we might consider a certain level of independence on the part of the song and the ‘music video’. However, as I will show below, the meaningful construction of Elsa as a character is deeply dependent on this song, and as such, the song might be meaningful outside of the film, but the film is less meaningful without the song. As with adaptations, the relation between ‘Let It Go’ as a music video and *Frozen* as a whole can be considered to be dialogical (Bruhn), as the song informs our reading of the film, but the film and its narrative context also inform our reading of the song. In fact, when interviewing three Danish children aged 11 about *Frozen*, they said that even though they normally watched the

film in the Danish language version, they preferred to listen to 'Let It Go' in English, and one of them would even change the language of this sequence when watching the whole film. Albeit not necessarily generalisable, this shows an example of real audiences treating the sequence as a music video within the film. As such, we might talk about the sequence of 'Let It Go' as both a conventional component of the Disney musical, it is Elsa's 'I want' song following the Broadway tradition (although it might be more suitable to talk about an 'I won't' song as Colleen Montgomery (113) does, or an 'I am' song as Bunch (97) does), but also as a media representation allowing for a different kind of viewing experience.

2. Lars Elleström's media model

Before moving on with the intermedial analysis of *Frozen* and 'Let It Go', it is necessary to clarify Elleström's framework and explain his basic concepts.

Elleström proposes to distinguish between three different dimensions of media, 'the technical medium of display', 'the basic medium', and 'the qualified medium'. The technical medium of display is a material entity that can be used to distribute a communicative and/or artistic message to someone. A computer, TV, or a canvas are technical display media. The technical medium of display is thus the *realization* medium, i.e., the material which can present semiotic content to a viewer or listener (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 33–34). Basic media, on the other hand, are expressive resources like *written text*, *sound*, *still image*, *moving image*, and *body performance* that can be used to communicate with, but are not organized into artistic or communicative genres (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 56–57). These basic media are the building blocks used in *qualified media*, which are art- and communication forms that are organized in accordance with artistic and communicative conventions, such as *music*, *painting*, *literature*, *dance* or even such a thing as *scholarly writing* (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 57–58).

Basic media are characterized by their 'modalities'. Note that even though Elleström is inspired by studies in multimodality, his use of the term 'modality' differs significantly from the way it is used in this field. Modalities, in Elleström's framework, are the formal structures of a medium, and these decide how basic media behave in terms of what can be communicated/represented and how (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 46–47). Accordingly, the modalities are the *form* that frames the *content*, and the modalities are crucial in Elleström's framework as they enable systematic comparison of basic media and a heightened understanding of the semiotic affordances.

Elleström distinguishes four such media modalities;

- the 'material modality' is the material interface of a medium, such as human bodies, sound waves and flat surfaces (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 47).
- the 'sensorial modality' is related to the senses that are evoked by the medium such as the auditory sense (or just 'hearing') and the visual sense (or 'seeing') (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 49).
- the 'spatiotemporal modality' relates to the spatial and temporal aspects of a medium as well as the medium's capabilities for *representing* time and space (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 48).
- the 'semiotic modality' relates to the kind of signs used to create meaning. In Elleström's model, this is related to the use of C.F. Peirce's 'icons', 'indices' and 'symbols'. Icons represent by *similarity*, that is, by looking or sounding like the thing they represent. Indexical signs (indices) represent by having a direct relation to that which they represent – common examples are footprints, which are indexical of whoever made the print. In literature, handwriting will be an indexical sign of who ever wrote it. Lastly, symbols are signs that represent by convention, as happens with most written and spoken words (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 49–51).

Thus equipped with a terminological toolbox for understanding media and media relations, I now move on to discussing perspectives on synchronic intermediality in *Frozen* and 'Let It Go' more in-depth.

3. Three aspects of synchronic intermedial analysis

The integration category is also sometimes described as a synchronic intermedial perspective (Elleström, “The Modalities of Media II” 73; Bruhn and Schirmacher, “Media Combination” 103), while the transformation category is described as a diachronic perspective, focusing attention on the “temporal gaps among modality modes, media products and media types” (Elleström, “The Modalities of Media II” 74). Such a distinction is useful as it highlights the differences between an analytical focus on the overt (c.f. Wolf) mix of media in a media product, e.g., the mix of music and poetry in song, and the more indirect medial references happening when content is adapted (transmediation) from a literary fairytale to an animated film, or when a film mimics conventions or structures from a music video (media representation). However, as pointed out by Elleström (“The Modalities of Media II” 73) and by Bruhn and Schirmacher (“Media Combination” 105), these categories are analytical perspectives, and all media products can be analyzed from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. When we take a closer look at an actual media product, like *Frozen*, and how a film like this is perceived, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives starts to dismantle. Should we consider ‘Let It Go’ to be a media representation of a music video, as discussed above, thus belonging to the diachronic perspective? Or should we consider the sequence to be, at the same time, *both* a music video and a film sequence, thus belonging to the synchronic perspective? Once a medium is evoked in another type of medium through reference or representation, is that medium not ‘synchronically’ present in the new medium, if not through the signifiers of the medium,² then at least through the perceiving mind which calls up this idea of the ‘other’ represented medium? In this way, media representation brings into being the represented media type. The case of ‘Let It Go’ is special in this regard as the animated music video and the animated musical film share the same basic media and only differ in their qualifying aspects, thus allowing for a seamless and complete integration, but the sequence still serves to shed light on the larger issue of getting hung up on classification systems. Furthermore, it is a case which is characteristic of all pre-composed film music – when John Cale is heard singing his version of ‘Hallelujah’ in *Shrek* (2001) (Adamson and Jenson)³ or when Merlin puts on ‘That’s What Friends Are For’ to “help set the mood” in *Shrek the Third* (2007) (Miller and Hui), then the music is not just film music and thus part of a synchronic relation, it is also a medial reference pointing to the qualified medium of pop and rock (or even the qualified submedium of pop song, see below). The fact that the music in the first example is used non-diegetically (i.e., the music is not heard by the characters), and the music in the second example is used diegetically, doesn’t change the dominance of the media representation aspect. This is not to say that there is no point in distinguishing between synchronic and diachronic relations or in using classification systems but to highlight the blurry and sometimes problematic borders between categories. Categories and concepts are ‘thinking tools’ (Queiroz and Atã 187–88), and as such they will both aid our analysis in helping to point out and organize different kinds of relations, but they might also act as blinders if we use them uncritically.

With this in mind, and branching across the traditional integration/synchronic–transformation/diachronic divide, I suggest that there are (at least) three important aspects to consider in synchronic analysis: combination of modalities, combination of qualified aspects – including covert media representation – and combination of semiotic content.

3.1. Combination of modalities

As stated above, Elleström’s model is useful in providing a framework within which to discuss and compare different media types. A qualified medium’s *specificity* (i.e., those things that make a medium type unique and recognizable) is given in its modal configuration and its qualifying aspects. Therefore, when we have media combinations and integrations, we need to first look at what a media product gains in terms of modalities from the combination, and what representational possibilities this opens up (what new possibilities are there of representing content due to the combination?).

Elleström defines genre as a qualified submedium, “a genre is a qualified media type that is qualified also within the frames of an overarching qualified medium” (Elleström, “The Modalities of Media II” 63–64). This makes animated musical film a qualified submedium of animation, which shares the same basic modalities as film. Film consists of the integration of the basic media types of moving images, auditory text, non-verbal sound, and organized sound. These basic media provide the resources for the images we see, the dialogue, sound effects (sounds of objects and environments) and the music we hear.⁴ It is outside the scope of this paper to go into a detailed account of the modalities here (such an account can be found in Jensen and Salmose), suffice it to say that this integration of images and multiple auditory media types ensures an encompassing range of available modalities, which most importantly combines two senses (hearing and seeing) and allows the auditive media types to connect with visual icons in the images in the semiotic modality, and the images to connect with auditory symbols in the dialogue and the music. This combination in the semiotic modality creates a broader range of affordances for semiotic expression and the combination of semiotic content (which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.3). Most importantly, the broader semiotic frame allows for both visualization and for resources to create mood and atmosphere. In the case of ‘Let It Go’, the song can be listened to alone, and the lyrics are perfectly capable of invoking cognitive imagery and giving voice to Elsa, but hearing the song while *seeing* (icons) Elsa creates another level of storytelling and characterization, just like the combination of visual colours and music enhances the emotional and dramatic potential (symbols). Watching Elsa construct her ice castle in ‘Let It Go’ would hardly be the same without the colourful ice spectacles *or* the musical buildup supporting the sequence.

3.2. Combination of qualified aspects and covert media representation

Just like the combination of basic media modalities alter the representational possibilities, so the qualifying aspects which are invoked through overt intermediality or media representation influence the meaning potential.

Films will often reference other qualified media as media representation, such as painting, newspapers, or poems, and when this happens, the qualifying aspects of the media are also referenced (see Bruhn and Gjelsvik for a detailed discussion of media representation in film). Thus, when a film, like *Shrek* (2001) (Adamson and Jenson) makes references to the qualified medium of literary fairy tales in its opening by showing pages from a storybook, supplemented by a voice reading from it, it also makes references to aspects that characterize this genre (in this case, it is probably more the Disney fairytale that is referenced), such as the convention of finding true love in the form of a beautiful prince or princess and living happily ever after. The reference is here used to set up *Shrek* as a parody of these conventions right from the start. Besides the media representation of music video discussed above, there is a moment in ‘Let It Go’ where Elsa is moving around in a gliding circular motion while constructing the inner ornaments of her castle, resembling somewhat a figure skater. We might see this as a media representation of the qualified medium of figure skating, emphasizing Elsa’s elegance and how at home she is in this icy environment, not to mention how the qualified medium of architecture is used to mirror Elsa’s new state of being; majestic, spectacular, and cold. Tim Reus also notes that Elsa’s new ice castle resembles her childhood castle, seeing this as a symbol of isolation, but with positive connotations for the ice palace, due to the brighter colours (277) (for a discussion of architecture as a qualified medium and a topic for intermediality, see Vieira).

The perhaps most obvious combination of qualified aspects in a film musical is that happening between the media of song, dance, and film. As discussed above concerning music video and film music, there is a distinction to make here between what we consider to be integration and what we consider to be media representation. In the case of *Frozen* and ‘Let It Go’ it is relevant to note that the animated Disney musical, as an established genre, can be considered a qualified submedium in itself, which, like other genres of film musicals, is constituted by the integration of film and musical (again an integration of song, music, dance and theatre). As Rajewsky notes,

[t]he conception of, say, opera or film as separate genres makes explicit that the combination of different medial forms of articulation may lead to the formation of new, independent art or media genres, a formation wherein the genre's plurimedial foundation becomes its specificity". (52)

As this combination is integral and constitutive of the medium itself with its own qualifying aspects, it might be accurate to consider any references to genres of dance, song, music, theatre, or film that originate from *outside* of the tradition of film musical, or in this case, the Disney princess musical, to be *media representation*. Considered in this way, the line between synchronic and diachronic aspects is once again blurred. The Disney princess musical relies heavily on media representation in the form of references to other vocal-musical cultures, which change throughout the development of this qualified submedium. Whereas the early Disney Princess musicals, such as *Snow White and the Dwarfs* (1937), had their princesses singing in an operatic style – evoking qualifying aspects of high-class music culture, the princesses of the Disney Renaissance, such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) recall conventions of the Broadway singing style, while the princess revival films (*Tangled* (2010), *Frozen*, *Brave* (2012)) to a larger extent draw on pop music. Jennifer Fleegeer argues that,

In all three eras, Disney relied on the female voice to validate new animated musical forms. Although the voices of the periods belong to particular styles of performance, they nevertheless serve as shorthand for authenticity, alerting listeners to the scene in which real bodies would be singing these songs (opera house, Broadway stage, pop concert). (128)

As musical trends and animation techniques have developed, new kinds of media representation have thus been employed in the Disney princess musical to keep the princesses authentic or relatable and to “justify” and “validate” new animation techniques (Fleegeer 129). Although written by Broadway composers Robert Lopez and Kristin Anderson-Lopez, ‘Let It Go’ follows the revival tendency with a notable pop sound, not least carried by the electric orchestration towards the end of the song. Following Fleegeer’s argument, Bunch suggests that for contemporary audiences “[t]he song’s resemblance to a pop anthem makes Elsa sympathetic and allows fans to take on her empowering embodiment as a heroine rather than a villainess” (97), suggesting that the reference to pop song enhances the feeling of intimacy compared to other songs in *Frozen* more closely aligned with a dramatic tradition.

3.3. Combination of semiotic content through integration

As noted above, animated film musicals are incredibly complex integrated media products, with several expressive resources providing meaning potential which is integrated into one narrative experience in the perceiving mind. To date, a number of models exist to address this meaning integration, which is often taken to be emergent, that is, the sum of the combination is bigger than the parts. Many scholars in this area do not refer to themselves as intermedialists but work in the areas of word and music studies (e.g., Bernhart; Kramer), word and image studies (herein studies of picture books, comics and graphic novels, Bateman gives a comprehensive overview), film music studies (Buhler gives a comprehensive overview; see also Jensen 107–15) or multimodality (Jensen gives an overview). Although the models differ in how to name and categorize different kinds of word/image/sound relationships, an often shared denominator across the mentioned fields is to distinguish between different levels of alignment of the semiotic content of the various media types, ranging from complete consonance (e.g. Nikolajeva and Scott 14) or conformance (Cook 98–99) (by Walter Bernhart referred to as “fusionist, interpretive”) between the represented meaning potential to contest (Cook 102–03) or counterpoint (Nikolajeva and Scott 17) (by Bernhart referred to as ‘separatist’). These kinds of models also tend to operate with categories in between the poles of coherence and contrast, the simpler models simply referring to a ‘middle’ category of complementation, where both media contribute with complementary information necessary for understanding the overall narrative or meaning of the media product. These kinds of classification models have also

been criticized within film music studies for being reductionistic in assuming that coherence on a structural and a semiotic level will always occur simultaneously, and for suggesting too strong a hierarchy between image and music.⁵ One of the most famous critiques has been made by Michel Chion, who stated that "there is no image track and no soundtrack in the cinema" (40) critiquing the idea that cinema should be a combined medium with two autonomous tracks which can be taken apart.

As I have argued elsewhere (Schirmacher and Jensen), multimodality and intermediality can fruitfully be considered two research areas with complementary approaches, and when analyzing the meaning generation happening in integrated media products, I argue that a multimodal approach, preferably informed by the relevant research traditions mentioned above, is best able to provide a systematic and detailed framework. Taking into account that film is not just a combination of two media with each their distinctive and independent meaning potential, I argue to extend and reframe the coherence – contrast model to take account of all the expressive resources in film. In referring to the integration of meaning potential as a 'multimodal dimension', I mean to address two problems: 1) Film is an integration of a vast number of *semiotic modes* (here defined as a socially constructed system of semiotic resources which can be manipulated independently) such as facial expression, colour, dialogue, sound effects, and melodic shape (of music). These semiotic modes cannot be reduced to the qualified submedia of filmic dialogue, moving images, and film music. 2) A semiotic mode, such as melodic shape, might be coherent with some semiotic modes, such as facial expression, while being complementary or contrastive with other modes, such as colour, at the same time (see Jensen, (chap. 5) for a detailed account of this model). Thus, discussing the integration of meaning potential necessitates a transcription of meaning-making material – here referred to as semiotic resources, and an analysis of how these resources combine over time throughout the analysed sequence.

The multimodal dimension is my development of the term 'audiovisual dimension' first used by sound designer Walter Murch and later by media scholar Iben Have to denote "the metaphoric distance between the images of a film and the accompanying sounds" (Murch XXII) – a distance which is both flexible, i.e. it changes from moment to moment, and perceptual, i.e. the relative depth of the audiovisual dimension refers to the time and ease with which the brain is able to fuse the sound and image and make sense of the connection. By rephrasing the concept as a *multimodal* dimension, I mean to acknowledge that "it is not music + image that equals film, but a multitude of auditive and visual modes that in interaction equals film" (Jensen 128), which echoes Chion's notion that "each audio element enters into simultaneous vertical relationship with narrative elements contained in the image (characters, actions) and visual elements of texture and setting" (40).

The tables below, quoted from Jensen gives an exemplification of how the concepts of semiotic modes and resources are understood in this paper, along with a schematic overview of the various semiotic modes deemed most important in 'Let It Go' and a simplified transcription. Note that the semiotic resources of the lyrics are notated both for the official Danish lyrics and for the original English lyrics.

The tables show that analyzing 'Let It Go' is not just a matter of determining the meaning potential of words, images, and music, but of locating the meaning-making structures within the individual features of these media, i.e., through analysing lyrics, facial expression, colour, melodic shape, and instrumentation individually. As a second step after doing the transcription, a transcription allows for the consideration of how the meaning potential of these different semiotic modes combines over time. The transcript provided here is a simplified transcript meant to illustrate rather than give a true account of the combination of semiotic resources, and what is important to note here is that all the different modes develop in a similar manner towards employing more powerful and active resources, effectively constructing a contrast between the beginning of the sequence and the end (see Jensen 142–53 for an in-depth explanation of the transcript and analysis of the sequence). The horizontal viewing perspective begins with a high angle and long zoom, making Elsa seem small, and while the high angle is also used towards the end, the very last image shows Elsa face-on at eye

<i>System of modes</i>	<i>Semiotic modes</i>	<i>Semiotic resources employed</i>
<i>Moving Image</i>	Colour composition	Blue, Violet, Red, Yellow, Orange, Green, Silver
	Horizontal viewing perspective	High angle, eye level, low angle
<i>Music</i>	Pitch/register (of accompaniment)	High, medium, low
	Harmony	Minor, Major, Unstable/modulating
	Volume	piano (low volume), mezzo forte (medium loud), forte, (loud), fortissimo (very loud)
	Instrumentation	Strings, classical piano, harp, horns, woodwinds, percussion (non- drums), chimes, drums, electrical guitar, bass-guitar, glockenspiel, electrical piano, synth
	Voice register	High register (head voice), medium register (mix), low register (chest voice)
	Lyrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Participants</i>: Elsa, 'dem'/'them' - (main) <i>actions</i>: at være dronning/being queen, storm indeni/swirling storm inside, lukker ingen ind/concealing feelings, lad det ske/let it go, ikke gemme sig mere/can't hold it back, lytter ikke/not caring, at være fri/feeling free, at blive til den man er/here I stand and here I stay, forbi med bitter gråd/not crying, kan aldrig vende hjem/not going back) - <i>Circumstance and setting</i> (ingen fodspor/no footsteps, isolation/isolation, sne/snowy, storm/stormy, koldt bjerg/cold mountain)
<i>Represented Body</i>	Body language	Dance, closed/insecure, open/inviting/confident, angry/violent, seductive, shrugging/hopelessness
	Facial expression	Joy, sadness, anger, surprise, contempt, fear

Figure 1: Overview of semiotic modes and resources in 'Let It Go' (Buck and Lee, 00.29.50), quoted from Jensen (142–43).

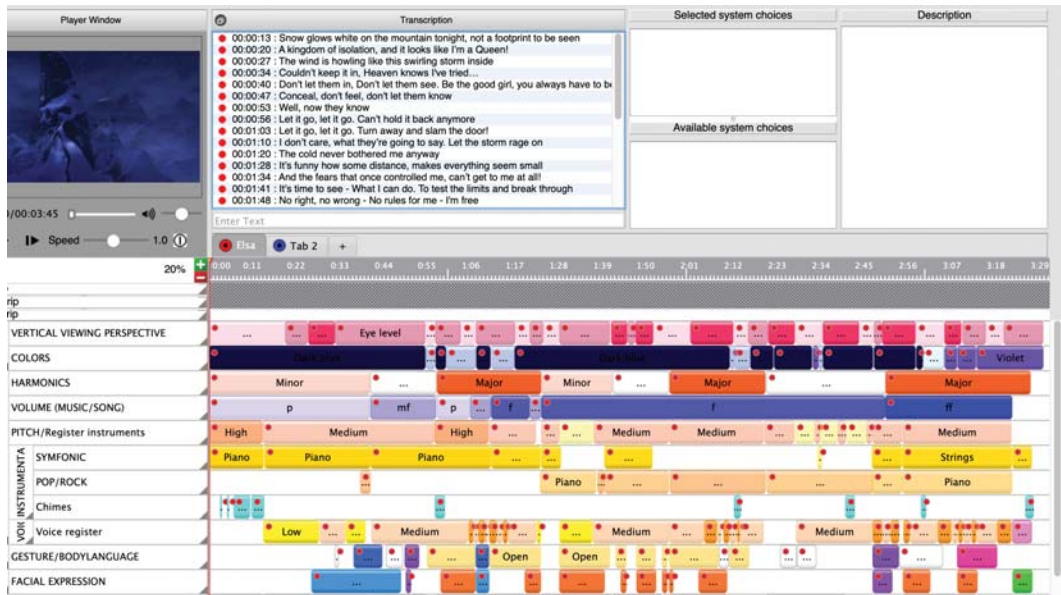


Figure 2: Simplified overview of the employment of semiotic resources in 'Let It Go' using the multimodal analysis video software by Multimodal Analysis Company, quoted from Jensen (144).

level, allowing her to look straight into the camera with a powerful gaze. The colours develop from being dominated by relatively dark and cold colours to more bright and vibrant colours, and both Elsa's body language and facial expression develop from being closed and sad to being open and happy (and perhaps angry or contemptuous) in the end. Musically, the sequence begins with a high-pitched, acoustically sounding solo piano with a fragile sound, played at a low volume and in minor (minor keys are often associated with sadness), and develops into a full pop orchestra playing at a more powerful medium timbre and high volume in major.⁶ The lyrics, along with the musical modes, develop through four phases mirroring Elsa's process: 1) 1. Verse and bridge: Elsa is insecure and lonely, with the lyrics focusing on the cold and isolated mountain and how this reflects Elsa's feelings. 2) 2. Verse and bridge, the lyrics here focus on how Elsa gains confidence and discovers that isolation means freedom and the ability to explore her powers. 3) The contrast sequence, in this part, the lyrics focus on Elsa's "powers and her integration with the natural forces" (Jensen 151) along with Elsa determining to "never going back, the past is in the past" (Buck and Lee), which she sings out with a powerful voice. 4) Final chorus, this part signals the final stage of Elsa's transformation where Elsa embraces a bright new day and declares that "the cold never bothered me anyway" (Buck and Lee), which can both be understood literally as the cold mountain being a not un-suitable home, and metaphorically, as her accepting the isolation of her new home.

Throughout, these four phases are closely co-constructed by the other semiotic modes, which transform along with the lyrics. Analysing the expression of isolation across lyrics, visuals and music in the English version of the sequence compared to two Dutch translations, Reus states that

[t]he ST [source text, i.e. the English language version] uses the lyrics' singability to develop isolation in unison with the harmony, beginning with many close and close-mid vowels and ending with many open and open-mid vowels to express Elsa's development from isolation to liberation". (278)

Reus thus shows how the development of semiotic modes located above extends also to vowel use in the lyrics. It should be noted that 'harmony' in this quote refers to "the emotional effect of the music itself, as dictated by issues including chord progression, key, and tempo" (Reus 274), and not simply to the harmonic quality of the chord scheme.

In this particular example of 'Let It Go', we are dealing with a large degree of 'coherence' between all the semiotic modes employed, something which is typical of Disney and Pixar movies. The semiotic modes here are all developed through time to support and co-construct Elsa's psychological and physical development and maturation, from a timid and lonely girl (or princess) to a mature, sensual, confident ice queen (or even a femme fatale, as noted by Alison Halsall (145)). The intermedial integration of semiotic potential from multiple sources is responsible for making this transition more engaging, powerful, and convincing. The musical modes and colours add an extra level of emotionality and construct an immersive spectacle, the lyrics allow audiences to sing along and take on Elsa's words as their own, and Elsa's body language and facial expression trigger the potential for recognition and empathy. As the relative depth of the multimodal dimension is flexible, however, one should not assume either a flat multimodal dimension (coherence) or a deep dimension (contrast) without careful consideration of all semiotic modes.

4. Conclusion

For songs, animated musicals, and other combined media, synchronic intermediality is key to understanding how meaning potential is composed. Based on, but also developing, Elleström's media model, I have proposed that when analysing synchronic intermediality, we need to consider (at least) three types of combination: 1) combination of modalities, 2) combination of qualified aspects, herein those aspects tied to media representation, and 3) combination of semiotic content. The case study of 'Let It Go' shows that even a short, animated song of just 3:38 minutes represents an immensely complex intermedial architecture, where both media representation and the combination of basic and qualified media add layers of meaning potential and alternative viewing experiences.

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Notes

¹ See, however, Jensen (142–53) for an in-depth musical and multimodal analysis. Stilwell; Reus; and Bunch also give brief considerations of the musical accompaniment.

² Wolf argues that in covert intermediality, a non-dominant medium is "not present in the form of its characteristic signifiers but, at least minimally, as an idea, as a signified" (41).

³ Even though John Cale's version of the song is used in the film, it is the version by Rufus Wainwright that is used on the soundtrack album (Fetters). This highlights the fact that *soundtrack albums* are a qualified medium which transmediates content from the qualified medium of *film music*, but the two media types are very much distinct.

⁴ I have previously argued that when studying film from a perception perspective, rather than a production perspective, it should be treated as an integrated medium, not a combined medium, and that moving images, dialogue, sound effects and film music differ to such a large degree from their non-filmic counterparts, and are so highly conventionalized within the filmic medium, that they should be considered qualified submedia in themselves, see Jensen and Salmose (30–31).

⁵ Note that Walter Bernhart distinguishes between fusionist interpretive songs where the semiotic potential aligns, and fusionist non-interpretive songs where melody and lyrics are aligned on a prosodic level (296). See also Arvidson et al. (123–29).

⁶ The verses are played in f minor, and the choruses in A flat (the major key which is parallel to f). Stilwell has observed, however, that the song emphasizes and ends on the subdominant to A flat, namely D flat, and even a D flat sus2. The tonic chord (here A flat) is located on the first step of the scale on which a melody is based, and this chord is often symbolically referred to as the 'home' of the melody. Ending a song on a dissonant (the sus2 makes it dissonant) subdominant rather than the tonic (here A flat) can thus be felt and interpreted to destabilize the ending of the song, here perhaps suggesting that Elsa's new ice castle is not her ideal home despite all that has proceeded. Stilwell's interpretation is that the song showcases that Elsa achieves individuation, but also that "this isn't a resolution available for female characters, or for society" (Stilwell).

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Vanishing Intermedialities in Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West"

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Abstract: There is a vast catalogue of research on Wallace Stevens's 1934 poem "The Idea of Order at Key West." The article offers a complementary alternative by carrying out a practical experiment of reading Stevens through a special method. It looks past interpretive determinations in order to bring into view the experience of reading the poem through the medium specific elements of the vanishing intermedialities by which the reader of any inclination is affected. The notions of design and agency are employed in an innovative fashion to evidence the effects of the words employed.

Keywords: Intermedial experience, three-tier model of mediality, design, agency, Wallace Stevens

“The Idea of Order at Key West” was published in 1934 in Wallace Stevens's second collection of poetry *Ideas of Order*. There is a vast catalogue of research on the much celebrated poem, with the responses ranging from highlighting its philosophical and stylistic merits to diverse thematic and biographical readings of the piece. I am offering a complementary alternative to such approaches by carrying out a practical experiment of reading Stevens through a special method. In the poem, there is a rich variety of sensory perceptions, both imagined and non-imagined, that are presented to the reader as words, evoking impressions of speech and song, among other things. They give rise to further imagined sensory perceptions, as well ideas about their meaning and attempts to recognize and settle on any meanings at all. In my rationale, it is the triad interaction between the sensory impressions, ways of presenting, and ideas that mediates the reading as a whole and constitutes the *intermedial experience* of the poem. The elements of this experience can be analyzed in detail through the *three-tier model of mediality* to be employed.

I will put forth the hypothesis the intermedial experience of “The Idea of Order at Key West” turns on the vanishing intermedialities the poem effects. The written words of the poem on the page, or screen, give way to what is happening within the world of the poem, engaging with the senses; the speech of the narrator gives way to the song of the she; her song gives way to ideas about the rich trappings of nature; song and speech and writing return as nature disappears, and the process goes back and forth. Previous readings show how the indeterminacy of this process can be observed philosophically or thematically, or anchored in understanding Stevens as the representative of a stylistic period or an individual poet. However, I will look past such interpretive determinations in order to bring into view the experience of reading the poem through the medium specific elements of the vanishing intermedialities by which the reader of any inclination is affected. It is precisely this attention to the material fundamentals of the poem that sustains the practical experiment.

Theory

The theory of intermedial experience was first developed in Toikkanen (2013) and most recently refined in Toikkanen (2023). Here I am providing a summary of the main features, while advising

the reader to turn to the sources for a more comprehensive account. Basically, the theory concerns the difference between reading as interpretation and reading as experience. On the one hand, interpretation is commonly understood as a hermeneutic or semiotic effort focused on extracting meanings from a textual object that contains them in the manner of a vessel. The meanings change according to time and place, and there is a multiplicity of them in a variety of authors, audiences, and modes of expression, but they are nonetheless extracted from the object by the interpreting subject. On the other hand, in the theory proposed, experience is phenomenologically understood as the whole process of becoming aware of the environment, consisting of sensing, perceiving, grasping, and interpreting (see Virtanen & Toikkanen 2020). In this thinking, experience contains interpretation, instead of the two approaches vying with each other.

Intermediality conjoins the theory by way of realizing that, to become aware of the environment, the awareness must be mediated. Awareness of something is, by definition, a mediated awareness. Whether it is a sensory perception, a grasp of there being something that is presented, for example, as words, sights, or sounds, or the dawning notion that the presentation is somehow meaningful, the experience is mediated. The theory of intermedial experience thus requires defining the concept of medium so that it explains what kinds of media are involved in the process of experience and how they interact with one another. The three-tier model of mediality was launched in Toikkanen (2017) and most recently tempered in Toikkanen (2023). It defines three tiers of media – senses, ways of presenting, and ideas – that function together to produce intermedial experience. As a method, the model is designed, and has been employed, for the purpose of analyzing case studies across second-tier media of presentation. The article at hand is the definitive literary showcase.

Two keywords particular to the analysis at hand are design and agency. First, design in this use refers to how the intermedial experience of the reader, corresponding to the speaker and characters in the poem, is structured through the medium specific elements of the poem, giving rise to ideas about the author, contextual factors, and other potential agencies. For instance, with knowledge of the formal and generic elements of poetry, the designer can employ them through a certain style or technique. The process resulting in a poetic structure can thus be called technological. To design a verbal poem, the poet employs words with knowledge of producing effects by this technology. Their act of designing is purposive in the sense of writing a poem, and it requires employing the resources of the medium of poetry for its execution. This medial condition persists objectively, although it differs from one instance to the next what those resources are, how an individual agentively employs them, and which effects and meanings they may wish to produce. The purposiveness of design, in other words, does not equal intentionality of meaning.

Second, agency in this use refers to the idea of an individual subject or subjects in action. In the model of mediality employed, the idea of a “subject” on the third tier is just as much an effect of intermedial experience as ideas of everything else – “order,” “Key West,” and the “she” of the poem included. The specific quality of the idea of a subject, or “self”, has to do with producing understandings of individual subjects who are discrete from one another, and so agentive in the sense of interacting on a logical and affective idea of discreteness – “I” am not “you” and I do not feel like you do. Without the idea of a self, we would not recognize and tell ourselves apart from any other idea we understood as different from our selves. I am going to demonstrate how the design of “The Idea of Order at Key West” brings to bear this ideational process of subjects in action, dramatized as the intermedial experience of the poem on three tiers of mediality. With the medium of poetry conceived of as a verbal technology – or the knowledge of producing purposive designs through words – and with agency defined as the idea of subjectively interacting on such designs, my hypothesis can be rearticulated so: the intermedialities vanish because they can.

Out of the past research on Stevens’s poem, notes on emphatic intermedialities should be accented in studying their vanishings. Michel Benamou (1959), for instance, has claimed Stevens is abled with “a strong visual imagination,” and he “presents conflicts of ideas as conflicts of forms and shapes” (54),

whereas Alan Filreis (1992) has argued for a paradoxical attitude on Stevens's part to period tendencies of Modernist art: "While deliberately stemming the flow of abstraction in purchasing his paintings, he tried to go along with it in the poetry." (236) It appears that, in terms of the sense of sight and the visual arts, Stevens preferred the traditional and representational techniques of expression, whereas in designing poetry he went the opposite way to bring into view the non-representational aspects of what could (or could not) be seen by an agentive use of words. Helen F. Maxson's (2005) comparison between Stevens and the poetry of Walt McDonald makes a telling point in showing how, in McDonald's technology, "the presence of photographs actually heightens aspects of the book's unifying vision as defined against that of Stevens." (424) There is no aspiration for such medial unity in Stevens, and the effect is purposively designed.

On the sense of hearing and the auditory arts, Angus Cleghorn (1998) has argued for how the poem shows "the supreme power of music over logic" (35), and Aaron McCollough (2002) for how "musical effects surface out of the swirl of sound, become coherent, and just as quickly disperse again into chaos" (101) in design with the poem's primary motifs of song and singing. The imagined sounds of "The Idea of Order at Key West," it seems, are just as powerful and irresistible as they are fleeting and volatile. Then again, as noted by Thomas F. Bertonneau, the audio recording of Stevens reading his poem – see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCilTBwQSZA> – provides a paradoxically fascinating counterpoint to the wild ephemerality of the imagined sounds as the poet conducts a performance that, in the non-imagined audio of the recital, is "simply lugubrious" (61). The medium of oral speech is agentively set against the written word and brought to an interpretive head. The turns of the medial conflict affect the listener and the reader, exciting further intermedial references such as Michael Ryan (1982) noting whether the poem's syntax creates "a pattern of movement" that is "if not like a grand ballet perhaps like a chamber dance." (34) It is indeed a point of wonder if Stevens's vanishing intermedialities are about lofty spectacle or more intimate contemplation.

As can be detected in the previous readings, "The Idea of Order at Key West" strongly engages with sight and hearing, on each of the three tiers of mediality, as the second-tier words seen on the page compel the reader to see and hear imagined sensory perceptions on the first tier. At the same time, the verbal design, through the medium of the written word, produces intermedial references (see Rajewsky 2005) to other second-tier ways of presenting such as painting, music, and dance that are not physically present in the design but are agentively as much part of the experience of the reader as the words. The first and second tiers excite simultaneously ideas on the third tier – about sensorial and artistic conflicts, notions of order and chaos, geographical and biographical contexts, moods of composure and melancholy – by which the process gains further momentum, feeds back to the first and second tiers, feeds back to the third tier, and so on. In this intermedial experience, it must be stressed, what is imagined is objectively as valid as the non-imagined. Whereas it cannot be regulated what exactly an individual will see and hear, and what kinds of interpretive conclusions they will draw based on their imagined sensory perceptions, if they do have the ability to imagine seeing and hearing things, the verbal design of the poem will compel them to do so. The imagined elements belong to the medial condition of technologically employing words for the purpose.

With the theoretical and methodological solution in place, along with a preliminary understanding of where the main foci of interest lie, the unique benefits to be gained from the practical experiment of reading Stevens should be spelled out. The hypothesis is this: the intermedialities of "The Idea of Order at Key West" vanish because they can. Past research has underscored numerous times how the poem's visual and auditory drama unfolds in an uproarious process of observing and creative human minds struggling to found their identities and very being against the vast and impersonal forces of nature (see, for instance, Crowder & Chappell 1987; Fry 2021; Goodridge 1995; Martin 2002; Naqipour, Taghizadeh & Lalbakhsh 2022; Shinbrot 2005; Wilde 1996). The interpretive method by which such determinations of the meaning of a literary text, and a verbal design in this case, are commonly made works like so: the reader reads the words, imagines seeing

and hearing things, may be emotionally and affectively engaged as they feel it, and extracts ideas that define the meaning of the text differently for each reader. This interpretive method indeed involves all of these factors but they are treated as separate, as if the reader, the poem, and the ideas it contains were ontologically removed from one another. In this kind of thinking, the same reader may return to the same poem for the same ideas – or different ones, depending on the interpretation – with the sameness of their agentive individuality guaranteed before and beyond the reading experience. In contrast, the theory of intermedial experience and the method of the three-tier model of mediality are based on the idea of individuality coming into being in the experience, through the purposive design technologically employed. In “The Idea of Order at Key West,” there is a speaker speaking and a “she” singing because that is how the speaker senses and understands what is presented. The agencies keep vanishing as that is how they are coming into being in the poem – this speaker and she do not exist before and beyond the verbal design.

Analysis

This ineluctability of the intermedial experience makes evident the objectively persisting medial condition under study. The poem’s effects are not immaterial or unreal but part of the verbal design fundamentally materialized in the experience an individual may agentively share with others – both by narrating what they felt and identifying similarities and differences. In what follows, I will share ideas on 1) moments of imagined sensory perceptions complementing sight and hearing in reading Stevens’s poem, 2) notes on the use of the past and present tense, as well as verbs disappearing or changing aspect from single actions to continuous states, and 3) indications of affectively charged moods, the recognition of which may instantly transform the intermedial experience even without necessarily compromising any agentive identification or interpretive determination.

To my knowledge, not much attention has been given on how the poem engages with the senses beyond sight and hearing that predominate in the scene. However, as there are imagined sensory perceptions present such as “The grinding water and the gasping wind,” “The heaving speech of air,” “The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,” and “Words of the fragrant portals,” they are deserving of recognition too. Whereas “the fragrant portals” in the final stanza have to do with the olfactory and potentially the gustatory in the way the “enchanted night” at Key West produces impressions of aroma and taste, the “grinding,” “gasping,” “heaving,” and “plunging” elements of the natural forces activate states of the sense of touch in the moment of the interaction between the sea and she. Specifically in “gasping” and “heaving,” the experience involves interoception, or the feeling of the internal body (see Schmitt & Schoen 2022; Quigley et al. 2021), as the witnessing of the rough duel compels the speaker and reader to imagine what gasping and heaving feel like, losing breath to the wind and air that appear overwhelming. The verbal design presenting this interoceptive experience does not come together in human song and singing, but excites the idea of nature in a state of sheer monotony (“a summer sound / Repeated in a summer without end / And sound alone”) and “meaninglessness,” describing anthropomorphized natural forces whose fleeting pathetic fallacies will never become human save in the similarly vanishing medium of the singing she and her song. To this purpose, the duel of the sea and she is shorn of combativeness, technologically producing an effect of paradoxical synthesis and vanishing similarity also for the speaker and reader as they are compelled to imagine losing their breath to the moment. Through sight and hearing alone, as in Kantian idealism, they can continue to stand apart and ultimately turn away from the scene, as if it was a theatrical performance, but through interoception, they agentively become part of the intermedial experience without which they would not be able to recognize the idea of their selves as different from what they were witnessing.

Some notes on the use of the past and present tense in “The Idea of Order at Key West” can further support the claim of the speaker and reader becoming alike to the sea and she in the verbal design of the poem’s vanishing intermedialities – regardless of any interpretive determinations of who they

might really be and what kinds of meanings they might be agentively assigning to their experience. Cleghorn has argued that "It is no accident that once her song is 'made' the present turns into past tense and she disappears from the rest of the poem." (33) There is a number of issues that I disagree with in this claim. The past tense is nearly exclusively used in the first five stanzas, with a couple of exceptions – the "may" in "It may be that in all her phrases stirred" and the directly cited question "Whose spirit is this?". It is rather with the inquiry in the imperative addressed to Ramon Fernandez in the first and third lines of the second to last stanza that there appears a shift from verbs describing single actions in the past tense to verbs involving continuous states in the present participle. In the first five stanzas, most of the present participles, taking in gerunds and other verbal nouns, consist of those analyzed above, while the rest include "fluttering," "vanishing," "striding," and "singing." In the second to last stanza alone, there are seven similar types of words – "singing," "fishing," "tilting," "fixing," and, at the climax of the final line, "arranging," "deepening," and "enchanting." Through the technology of the English grammar, the words of the poem are purposively designed to produce the effect of abandoning past single actions for present continuous states. The intermedial experience of the scene with the sea and she may not be sustained without it vanishing into the agentive identifications of the speaker with himself and, potentially, of the reader with Ramon.

Moreover, contrary to Cleghorn's argument, the song of the she does not disappear from the rest of the poem either – her imagined singing is the objectively medial condition of the speaker and reader being able to recognize their selves in this very fashion. The imagined touch perceptions to do with interoception in the first five stanzas, "grinding," "gasping," "heaving," and "plunging," along with "fluttering" and the kinaesthetically oriented "striding," connect with the present participles of the second to last stanza in repeating the sound of "singing" that gives way to sights that culminate in the "deepening" and "enchanting" night of the final line. This present night is where the senses are engaged with as a whole, from the auditory and visual to the interoceptive, from outside observation to inside gut feeling that vanish into one another to come into being at all. For Cleghorn, the verbal nouns "emphasize symbolic action" (34) but, for me, they amass the imagined sensory perceptions of the poem's scenes in the most materially fundamental fashion possible. Against Cary Wolfe's (2008) claim of the sensory merely providing the "material and perceptual substrate" for interpretive work by which to locate the "meaning of the artwork" (263), it is the task of the theory of intermedial experience to evidence that the sensory cannot be reduced to raw matter on which interpretation operates. In the three-tier model of mediality, the sensory perceptions, non-imagined or imagined, their ways of presenting, and the ideas they excite all occur simultaneously to produce intermedial experience. The fact that there is not a single verb in the final stanza of Stevens's poem – unless one chose to read "rage" in the first line as an imperative – indicates there is no need for verbs in accepting the sustained continuous state of everything vanishing into everything else to come into being. There is no idea of order, of something coming first and another thing next at a place such as Key West, without the imagined sensory perceptions, the purposiveness of the verbal design, and the agentive identifications and interpretive determinations of Stevens's poem.

I will explore one more aspect of intermedial experience in "The Idea of Order at Key West," the effect of the mood. Many of the previous readings have focused on the consequences of the identifying the speaker in this or that way, drawing on the tumultuousness or contemplativeness of the alternating interaction between nature and the human mind. The affective logic of the encounter has not been articulated as much, unless, for the purpose, one adopts the mood of Charles Berger's (2006) idea of the poem expressing "the charge and discharge of energy between sublimation and erotic fixation or regression" (177), Brooke Baeten's (2000) further psychoanalytical twist of "a complex manifestation of artistry and gender difference," or the Romantic ruminations of Allan Chavkin (1982), Douglas Mao (1994), and Albert Gelpi (1995) as stylistic indicators of what Stevens may have aspired for with his verse. In these alternatives, however, the mood fails to rise bottom up from the imagined sensory perceptions presented in words to excite an array of ideas. Instead, the

ideas of Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis and Romantic style descend top down on the verbal and the sensory to saturate the readings from the start. The mood is regulated by the interpretive determination to match the criteria underscoring the chosen perspective, which is a perfectly valid option for the reader agentively seeking to prove a particular point (philosophical, stylistic, thematic, biographical) about “The Idea of Order at Key West.” The theory of intermedial experience, in contrast, turns the method the other way around, and shows how the affective logic scaffolding Stevens’s poem does not depend on ready ideas but rather makes them possible through the verbal design. The reader may wonder about the mood in the final stanza. Is it one of meditative composure, agitated defiance, resigned melancholy, or something altogether else? Each of these instances serve as indications of affectively charged moods of reading the ending of the poem. Choosing one over another does not necessarily compromise the way the reader understands their self as an individual reader, and it does not have to change the interpretation they have come by this time – they are free to read however they want. What the mood does transform is the experience. When the mood is not regulated by the kind of point the reader sets out to prove in advance, the effect of the verbal design is primed. The imagined sensory perceptions presented in words are evidenced as the objectively medial condition for any experience of mood and ideas that depend on them. As in the three-tier model of mediality, the third-tier ideas cannot exist without the first-tier sensory perceptions and second-tier ways of presenting, all of which keep on feeding back to each other in a continuous process, in medium specific ways. The vanishing intermedialities in “The Idea of Order at Key West” demonstrate how the poet designing a verbal poem can employ words with knowledge of producing effects by the technology of language, employing the resources of the medium of poetry to bring to the fore how intermedial experience comes into being and makes agentive identifications and interpretive determinations possible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this practical experiment has been to complement the variety of past studies on Stevens’s poem, and to demonstrate how reading understood as intermedial experience both differs from understanding reading as interpretation and contains it. The theory is phenomenological rather than semiotic, the implication of which Simon Critchley (1996) has described thus: “World-experience is word-experience” (287). How the speaker and reader are compelled to lose breath by the words, how everything vanishes into everything else by the lack of verbs, and how mood as verbal design transforms the experience of “The Idea of Order at Key West” – they are all part and parcel of the analysis on display. I close by sharing some ideas on the mood of the last two stanzas of the poem as resigned melancholy. As pointed out, there are no verbs at all in the final stanza, unless, through some uncommon syntax, “rage” in the first line were read as an imperative. The scene between the sea and she has been uncontrollable and strongly auditory, now it is over, and there lingers a sense of static and haunting visuality. If the whole poem was indeed read with the sense of hearing ruling over the first five stanzas and sight assuming the role at the ending, the sensory separation of the composed speaker from the enlivening she might be too much for them to handle. The consequence in mood could well be agentively experienced as melancholy, with a touch of defiance flavouring the repeated calls for rage. Yet, as I am suggesting, the sensory palate of the poem does not rely on sight and hearing alone – specifically interoception has an integral part in connecting the first five stanzas with the last two stanzas of the poem, while aroma and taste are also engaged with. It could well be that, at the end, it is the entire sensorium of the five senses, and beyond them, “In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds” that instills the intermedial experience of “The Idea of Order at Key West” with vague ideas of what lies “beyond the genius of the sea” and “her voice that made / the sky acutest at its vanishing.” Is it about God and raw nature? Or rather about “proof of human consciousness as culture and art,” as Helen Vendler (2018) has proposed? I would not just side with either position. Instead, as it is for the genius of the sea and for the she who shows the power of

both the sky and her voice to be at their most intense as they vanish, so it is for the speaker and reader to experience their selves most completely as their world vanishes into the words. In this account, such is the source of mediated awareness, of the human and the rest.

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In Flux: Actor-Network Theory, Concrete Poetry, and Critical Making

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Abstract: The fluidity of literature aligns with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which posits a greater focus on all facets of a network of associations, including non-human actants, and can assist in encouraging us all to consider broader relationships written into the poem, as well as those manifested by the relationships between the reader, writer, speaker and poem itself. By employing critical making to design and construct a video portrayal of the poetic elements and networks, we are able to see how they are constantly in flux, moving and evolving, and specified to any unique reader of a poem.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, feminism, critical making, pedagogy, visualizations

“Literature was never only words, never merely immaterial verbal construction. Literary texts, like us, have bodies, an actuality necessitating that their materialities and meanings are deeply interwoven into each other.” —Katherine Hayles, 2002

“[Glitch] mobility is gorgeous, slippery, keyed up, catastrophic. It is the thing that keeps us blurry and unbound, pushing back against hegemony.” —Legacy Russell, 2020

Introduction

In literature courses, a pervasive task is unlearning the association and identification of the author as speaker—especially for poetic works. When readers exclusively read the poet as the speaker, or the “I” of the work, then symbolism, infused meaning, and illustrative images become dubbed as biographical markers—even when fictionalized. In decentering the author as speaker, students and readers are challenged to understand the text as an individual work in *addition to*, rather than a direct result of, the biographical context it may carry. As Zach Payne (2020) writes: “So, when you are reading a poem, your first question shouldn’t be *What is the poet saying?* Rather ask, *What is the speaker saying?* In adding that extra lens of nuance, there is a whole world of understanding” (2020). Similarly, Jason Miller identifies that a poem is what a moment feels like (2017). But what connections, memories, relationships, ideas are entangled and exasperated by that moment and that feeling? Further complicating this dynamism: texts are in flux. In engaging with Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” through an arts-based approach with a community of non-experts, Chelsea Bihlmeyer writes: “I observed a relationship between text and context, author and audience in this specific discourse community, who demonstrated three arguments. First, a work is not singular and fixed. Second, meaning is not inherent to a work. And third, meaning is not singular and fixed” (74). As Bihlmeyer’s work emphasizes, we tend to associate literature as that which is stagnant; however, texts change because we do. The way and manner we read something, and what we learn from it, will be different in five, ten, and fifty years. Texts, their lessons and meanings, are in flux because we are.

The fluidity of literature, especially in relation to time, readers, and understanding, aligns with Actor-Network Theory (ANT) — as best conceptualized by Bruno Latour, John Law, and Rita Felski, all explored more fully below. ANT, which considers the interconnectivity and relationships

across various networks and systems, posits a greater focus on all facets of a network of associations, including non-human actants (such as trees, worms, clouds, and a feeling of joy) and can assist in encouraging students to consider broader relationships written into the poem, as well as those manifested by the relationship/s between the reader, writer, speaker and poem itself. Thus, this work contributes to the growing field of digital and experiential learning and falling at the nexus of theory and praxis for poetry pedagogy and digital humanities.

Similar to the work of Álvaro Seïça, John Cayley, and Jessica Pressman—this work lies at the nexus of the literary, the digital, and the process. While Pressman emphasizes a “model of how to ‘MAKE IT NEW’” with digital modernism and Seïça and Cayley explore the role of time with that which is digital and literary, I explore similar concepts through the lens of critical making. In utilizing and employing critical making, which relies on making, doing, and experience to learn, observe, and explore, I construct a video portrayal of the poetic elements and networks. Thus, we are able to see how they are constantly in flux, moving and evolving, and specific to any specific reader of a poem. All the more, the fluidity of networks, namely with ANT, juxtaposes the static-nature of poetic materiality. As such, ANT may lead students to also ask *What is the very page saying, and what is it saying to the speaker and to me? How are these different?* In exploring this argument, I studied “Morning Glories” by Mary Oliver to address: How can we study and learn from a poem by prioritizing ANT?

Groundings

In calling for ANT considerations among the literary, Rita Felski notes: “What is an actor? For ANT, it is anything that makes a difference” (748). Felski’s framing of ANT parallels John Law’s emphasis the role of non-humans in the social: “networks are composed not only of people, but also of machines, animals, texts, money, architectures—any material you care to mention” (381–382). Similarly, Bruno Latour pointedly addresses that “An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action” (373). In framing actants, any and all participants and forces of networked significance, Latour demonstrates the capacities of ANT as a method where “ANT is not about *traced* networks, but about a network-*tracing* activity” (378). Of the network, Felski explains that network, and networking, refers to “including as many actors as feasible in our research, the researcher included, and tracing the complexities of their interactions” (749). While we may immediately identify the network of a poem as exclusive to that which includes the reader, the poem, and the poet—we must actively consider all the actants involved.

Therefore, as we look to a poem on a page, digitally rendered, and mediated through artistic adaptation, Jörgen Schäfer reminds us that “Computer systems and networks are not mere channels for the transmission of messages” (26), and that the digital, the technical, and the electronic are elements needing great consideration in networks (55). The technologies that are increasingly taking footing in our every day and all moments are no longer (nor were they ever) simply passive, background-like entities that we cast our own shadows, stories, relationships, and connections unto. They are part of the greater networks that we too find ourselves in. Moreover, as Katherine Hayles writes: “[digital technologies] put into play dynamics that interrogate and reconfigure the relations between authors and readers, humans and intelligent machines, code and language” (186). Thus, the electronic systems that allow and permit our engagement with reading and experiencing literature, art, and community (including this article) deserve greater attention as complicit actants that contribute to the network as a whole.

All the more, concrete poetry, which prioritizes the *visual* as a rendering of the poem, serves as a valuable framework that this project falls in line with. Importantly, the Poetry Beyond Text project and research team emphasizes the role of the reader in concrete poetry: “Concrete poetry puts the reader centre-stage: it offers merely incentives, naked linguistic structures, mental play-areas, but it is up to the reader and his or her poetic imagination to fill in the blanks.” As this poetic form is reliant

on the recognition of associations brought in by the reader, we see strong correlations between concrete poetry and ANT.

In furthering considering and reframing who and what is part of the network, we see an intentional deconstruction of binaries (namely the human and the nonhuman). Significantly, this practice of challenging and even refuting binaries has long been evidenced by intersectional feminist methodologies—and is seen today with the principles of *Data Feminism*. As such, I draw upon D'Ignazio and Klein's call to "embrace emotion and embodiment" as a facet of data feminism (77). They illustrate the harm of false binaries, such as of reason and emotion, which carries a lengthy gendered history, and how "Decorative elements...are associated with messy feelings—or, worse, represent stealthy...attempts at emotional persuasion. Data visualization has even been named as 'the unempathetic art' by designer Mushon Zer-Aviv because of its emphatic rejection of emotion" (77). Through this analysis, D'Ignazio and Klein press us to wonder: *What might emotional data look like?* and *What might a knowledge system that recognizes this form of data and knowledge sharing be like?* As such, I intentionally lean into emotion through this analysis, thus embracing Donna Haraway's framing of situated knowledge as a "practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (585). In doing so, my critical making work pointedly engages in passionate construction and emotional data sharing.

And yet, I am cognizant of the fact that I am working with a published, existing, tangible, and material work—with actants and relationships I may never be fully aware of. As Bihlmeyer asks: "How does an audience understand and co-create meaning in an object after it has been offered for consumption?" (72). While I prioritize my own situated knowledge and embrace emotion to redesign and reimagine through artistic measure and play, I rely on critical making as my methodology to explore this published poetic work. Here, I look to two key understandings:

1. Garnet Hertz offers a foundational identification of critical making as a concept and methodology of *making*—prioritizing intentionality, critical analysis, and the opportunity to learn through experimentation and doing.
2. Simultaneously, I draw upon Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* and the role of remixing: "The spirit of remixing is about finding ways to innovate with what's been given, creating something new from something already there" (134).

Together, Hertz and Russell emphasize the practice, the capacity, and the necessity of work that employs critical making, remixing, remaking to explore the world around us. Neither solely prioritizes art (nor literature or any other discipline)—but both explore the capacity of doing, of making, and of creating. More importantly, as these scholars' work illustrates, we need space and time to employ these methods to grapple, interrogate, and challenge the work around us as an opportunity for learning and innovating.

As these groundings collectively illuminate, there is much work illustrating the applicability of ANT in design and literary realms, yet this work pointedly aims to conjoin ANT, feminist strategies, and digital-based critical making to continue contributing to ANT's methodological goals as a "network-tracing activity" (378).

Methods

In order to address how ANT can help students and readers better engage with poetry and further differentiate the author and the speaker, I look to Latour (17) and Law and their work with ANT to develop a visual-based moving depiction to study "Morning Glories" by Mary Oliver where I investigate how utilizing this theory and drawing it into poetry lessons can help decenter the role of the author as the "I," help encourage students to consider non-human actants, and potentially provide richer, more dynamic readings. In doing so, I explored how ANT may permit the reader to create

distance from a text by tracing and identifying networks and patterns that they too are part of by identifying and mapping the different relationships, networks, and connections revealed in a poem.

As Hayles notes: “the [electronic literature] medium lends itself to experimental practice” (17). Thus, this work relied on great experimentation through creation. In using a standard Windows Video Editor, I generated a video-based collage of my personal network with “Morning Glories.” Before I read the poem, I thought briefly of how I could visually relay the experience of engaging with a poem and its corresponding network, and this continued to evolve as I read the poem, studied it, and tried to represent my readership in relationship to the written word. After generating the video rendition of the network, I also created three data visualizations that explore the same network and relations with data I compiled from the poem. Through this, I aimed to offer a supplement to the video, but also craft a juxtaposition between what is traditionally understood as indicative of data—and that which is not.

“Morning Glories”: Poem and Representations

MORNING GLORIES

Blue and dark blue
 rose and deepest rose
 white and pink they

are everywhere in the diligent
 cornfield rising and swaying
 in their reliable

finery in the little
 fling of their bodies their
 gear and tackle

all caught up in the cornstalks.
 The reaper's story is the story
 of endless work of

work careful and heavy but the
 reaper cannot
 separate them out there they

are in the story of his life
 bright random useless
 year after year

taken with the serious tons
 weeds without value humorous
 beautiful weeds.

For the purpose of this description, I am focusing on four key facets: 1) me and Mary Oliver, 2) pacing and cutting of video and/or image, 3) the inclusion of audio, and 4) time.

The above video is deeply personal; rooted in me as a reader at this exact time, in this place, in this particular moment of living and being. The video opens with my hands flipping through my copy of Mary Oliver's poetry collection, *Devotions*, emphasizing the identification of a reader. Yet, the absence of a reader's face, my face, illustrates the ambiguity of my relationship with this poem, this poet, and my understanding. I, like this work, am in flux. Conversely, a singular image of Mary

Oliver demonstrates my limited knowledge of her, her work, and her life. The singularity of her representation illustrates how I currently know her.



Video Visuals – Visuals from Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a video portrayal

Quick cuts between each individual word of the poem deconstructs the whole into parts; echoing how we would read a poem out loud, word for word. Yet, as the video progresses, this linearity quickly crumbles, as the visualized reading relies on drawn connections and tracings that relays associations: colors, scenes, images. The audio provides another layer to this work. Firstly, my auditory reading of the poem does not follow the visual display of the poem. The disjointed sensory displays thus relay the poem in flux. Secondly, and simultaneously, the sound of birds can be heard—which I heard and recorded from my home as I read this poem for the first time.

The video itself relays a set time: after a few minutes, it ends. One can watch it again, or not. I see this as a limitation, yet also a great advantage. The finitude revels in the ending, cutting off the display of the networks—despite the reality of the networks, the associations, and the tracings not bound by this scope of time. Yet, this also illustrates how my reading of this poem, and my connections with and through this poem, may be different tomorrow. A new visualization, or an extended one, would be necessary to capture this. Conversely, the below visualizations serve as juxtaposing network displays.



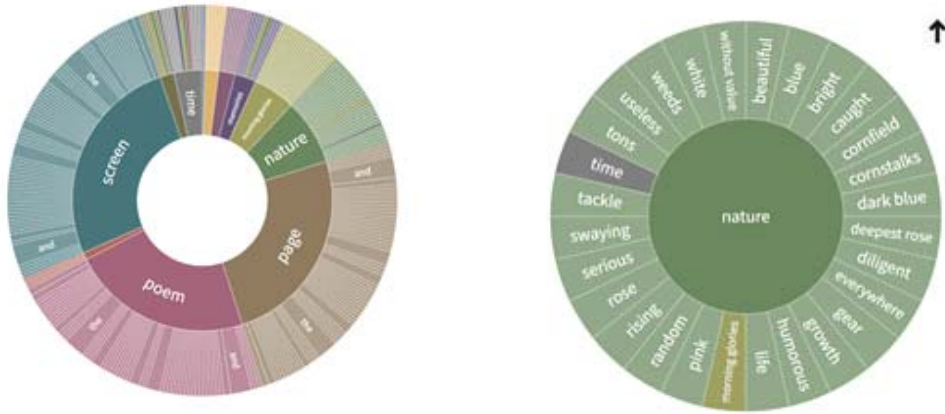
Still from Visual 1 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with DataSketch

This visualization relays the quantified points of the network—allowing certain relationships to be highlighted and emphasized. Created with [Data Sketch](#), I aimed for this visualization to mirror the shape of a morning glory: a circular bloom. In doing so, I looked to nature in striving to relay data—as also seen in the coloring of the visual that mirrors the rose and deep rose of Mary Oliver’s morning glories. Yet, this visual is limited due to its narrow capacity for interactivity and engagement—which I explore more fully below.



Stills from Visual 2 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with Flourish

Unlike the circular display, this web-based visualization constructed with [Flourish](#) prioritizes user-interactivity and exploration. Only when the user clicks on the dots are the words and their connections made clear. Additionally, there is great user autonomy in that the visual can be modified, moved, and completely rearranged—corresponding with Law and Latour’s understandings of ANT as an action to be performed and explored (Law 389; Latour 378). Yet, we once more see the coloring of morning glories carried into the poetic representations and mappings.



Stills from Visual 3 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with Flourish

The final visualization is a circular hierarchy art, also made with Flourish. Like the initial circular visualization, the shape of the focal flowers is once more represented with earth tones, yet greater interactivity is incorporated to display the numerical weight of words, images, and associations. Also important here is the display of weight: nature carries a heavier weight, or more space in the visual, than time or memories. Additionally, from this visual it is clear that the words “the” and “and” are mentioned the most from this visual, but it also illustrates how the speaker (I) experienced the poem as mediated by the page and the computer screen.

In further considering the role of interactivity across all these depictions, the interactivity found in varying in degrees with these charts speaks to that which is elicited by this very website: to read and to learn, a user must scroll and engage. Thus, the reader (you before the screen), are brought into the experience of tracing and exploring networks—just as ANT calls for, engaging us all in the never-ending continuum of relational being. As such, one cannot separate themselves from the networks we are un/cognizantly a part of, much like how “the/reaper cannot/separate” (13–15). Moreover, this embracement and emphasis on multimodality, from the website and the static poem to the video and visualizations, seeks to illuminate the capacity of networks that exist through and within technologies.

Collectively, all these products relay similar data across their various styles and modalities, and their unified positioning here demonstrates the difference between that which we readily accepted as data (such as the above charts) and that which is not (such as the above video). All the more, they all display a differentiated understanding of this poem, as well as a differentiated manner and method of understanding this work.

Comparative Reflection

Of great note—this poem does not actually invoke the “I”—rather there is an omniscient narrator and speaker, which perhaps furthers my emphasis on divorcing the author from the speaker (with no specificity with the “I” or speaker, we can assess that the speaker could be anyone/everyone/no one). And while I initially came to this poem and broader project wanting to decenter the “I,” the speaker of the poem, away from the poet, but rather, in prioritizing ANT, I realized how much we, as readers, bring to a poem and how fully we can saturate ourselves within the networks that this text is a part of.

I compare my reading and my understanding of the networking embedded within and through this poem as that which is cyclical and drill-like: the more time I engaged with the poem and considered how to aptly represent it, the more I felt tethered to the poem, to its symbols and images, and the more I identified my own personal and lived experience within the text. As the video illustrates, my understanding of this poem went from visual-symbolism to an eco-feminist reading (as relayed through the visuals focusing on leaves, grasses, and weeds that directly mirror the language of the text, pointedly the final line: “beautiful weeds”), and then ultimately to a deeper, far more personally-entangled reading — much like Oliver’s vines caught in cornstalks (line 10). More specifically, when I started to associate the “reaper” as a farmer, I sifted through digitized family photo albums to find relics of my family’s farm. Boldly apparent to me now is the fact the farm, carrying the family name, is called “Story’s Farm” —which begs strong alignment to the lines: “The reaper’s story is the story/of endless work... (lines 11-12) and “the story of his life” (line 16). Thus, the crux of the poem, and my understanding, transitioned from identifying the “beautiful weeds” (line 21) as resistant and enduring feminist symbols that resist and regrow, to experiencing this poem exploring that *and* the history of farmers toiling and tending to the earth, season after season, day after day—enveloping time, space, and my own memories. This meaning association and understanding does not have to be either/or: it does not have to be an ecofeminist poem or a poem related to the personal recollection of my family. It can be both — and more. Such messy, dynamic multiplicity strongly speaks to Hayles’s claim that “Literary texts, like us, have bodies, an actuality necessitating that their materialities and meanings are deeply interwoven into each other” (107).

Following the interwoven nature of meaning, this project could never end; perhaps a more fully and authentic ANT practice would not end and fully embrace the fluidity of networks throughout time and space. Yet, for this limited and scoped work of tracing networks, as Law (389) and Latour (378) call for, I arrived at a more dynamic understanding of this poem that reflected my own complicity and attachment to the various actants relayed in the text through the process and practice of critical making via remixing and reconstructing. Moreover, the process in which I utilized to arrive at this fluid understanding illustrates a break from a fixed and stagnant interpretation of meaning—and favors one that can grow, change, and even diminish without me, beyond me, and with all variations of me. Poetry is meant to be read out loud, but it is also to be experienced—and this project aims to achieve a dynamic experience of reading/seeing the poem through an innovative digital approach.

Conclusion

In constructing ANT-based visualizations, namely a video-based display, that strived to trace various connections between, across, and through Mary Oliver’s “Morning Glories,” I explored how poetic elements and networks are constantly in flux, moving and evolving, and specified to the reader of a poem. By prioritizing ANT, I focused on all facets of a network of associations, including non-human actants to consider broader relationships written into the poem, as well as those manifested by the relationship/s between the reader, writer, speaker and poem itself. In doing so, this work illustrated how these connections, relationships, and alignments are much like Oliver’s beautiful weeds, for “they/are everywhere” (lines 3-4).

Moving forward, this standalone project could lead into a more interactive opportunity to invite all readers to engage with tracing networks with this poem. In the future, more research, spanning the ludic to the academic, should strive to construct and trace networks, such as I have illustrated here, to continue exploring the capacities of ANT, digital concrete poetry, and feminist methodologies in the realm of critical making.

Notes

1. In Flux: Actor–Network Theory, Poetry, and Critical Making : <https://kvdufresne.github.io/MorningGlories/>
2. Video – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a video portrayal : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5r27xmKcPM>
3. Data compilation: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WlqU0PQDT4svZrDBEr8MjhQgt002tUI70mg6h-hMKXA/edit?usp=sharing>
4. Visual 1 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with <https://kvdufresne.github.io/MorningGlories/>
5. Visual 2 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with Flourish: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/5824719/>
6. Visual 3 – Reading “Morning Glories” with ANT; a datified portrayal made with Flourish: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/5824692/>

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Breaking the Mould: Multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*

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Abstract: This article looks at the affordances of multimodal poetry and how multimodality crosses and broadens poetry's conventional generic boundaries by discussing the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019) and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017). Both works are examined as postcolonial engagements with, and attempts at writing back to, the (trans)national histories explored in these volumes and are compared to one another in their capacity as multimodal poetry volumes. The article demonstrates the versatile ways in which non-lyric modes can be used either to lend poetry a sense of authority or to question the notion of authority.

Keywords: Multimodality, poetry, Jay Bernard, Koleka Putuma

1. Multimodality and Multimodal Poetry

What is poetry? When does something stop being poetry? Our conventional, textual conception of poetry as a set of lines arranged so that they adhere to certain patterns of rhyme and meter does not do justice to the generic hybridity of contemporary poetry. Dubbed “a multimodal era”, the 21st century has seen an “increase in the popularity of multimodal forms [that can be] closely related to the zeitgeist of their era of creation” (Gibbons 3), most notably to the era's technological developments, which have resulted in “a thoroughly changed media landscape” in which media and medialisation (especially mass media and digital media) have a strong impact, also on literature and its form, “fostering the emergence of new hybrid genres” (Nünning & Rupp 203). This influence can also be observed in the poetry of today, most notably in its willingness to cross its own boundaries and absorb other media and modes. Contemporary poetry's generic hybridity, however, cannot be divorced from its content, as this article will demonstrate in its exploration of the interaction between the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019) and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017).

Multimodality, “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (Kress and van Leeuwen 20), is still a rather recent concept in both narratology and literary research (“Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Gibbons). These modes are numerous and vary widely; common examples include photographs, paintings, drawings, maps, charts, and diagrams (Albers & Harste, “Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Kovalik & Curwood). Critics have also noted the use of colour, transcripts, recordings, interviews, handwritten letters, lists, footnotes, multimedia archives, or even hashtags in multimodal works (Alghadeer, “Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Senior, Paquet). In multimodal works, a dominant or main mode “may be chosen to represent meaning” (Albers & Harste 11). While poetry's main mode is arguably the lyric, as this is the mode in which our conception of poetry is grounded, all modes “jointly contribute to

the production of one whole meaning in a single act of communication” (“Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes” 642). As my exploration of the use of archival materials (such as photographs or transcripts of interviews), footnotes and lists in *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* will show, modes other than language can prove just as crucial to poetry, both in individual poems and in the volume as a whole.

Both works are debut poetry volumes by young Black queer authors from Britain and South Africa respectively and share a decolonial engagement with history. *Surge* presents a creative reimagination of the disastrous fires of New Cross (1981) and Grenfell (2017) in London, which Bernard anchors in (Black) British history. The British non-binary author (pronouns: they/them/their) infuses their text with archival materials and also makes reference to the Windrush Scandal (2018), when especially the Black British community responded with outrage to the government’s wrongful deportation of at least 83 members of the Windrush generation after many years of UK residency (Rawlinson). Bernard’s narrative poetry collection, which has overlapping thematic interests with writers of African heritage (Lowe 3), “offer[s] [...] not just counter-histories but explorations and re-imaginings of what truth and history might usefully mean in twenty-first century Britain, and how such knowledge can be passed on and kept alive” (Potts 117). Similarly, *Collective Amnesia* – which is advertised on the back cover as an “exploration of blackness, womxnhood and history” – is “concerned [...] with the exploration of forgotten memories and histories” (Burger 23) and “resonate[s] with the political and social zeitgeist of disillusionment and frustration in post-transitional South Africa” (Haith 38). In this volume of lyric poetry, Putuma (pronouns: she/her), provides what reads as versified memories to “ask what has been learnt and what must be unlearned” (Putuma back cover), drawing on various (non)lyric forms (e.g. dictionary entries, interview) to do so.

While both Bernard and Putuma have been hailed as exciting and important new voices in Britain and South Africa respectively (Woolf, Pieterse), neither *Surge* nor *Collective Amnesia* has received much scholarly attention. Criticism on *Surge* has focussed primarily on the volume as a response to recent historical changes (Lowe) and the role of the ghost (Chokesey, Lawson Welsh) and, formally, on the role of the archive (Jayakumar-Hazra, Lawson Welsh). Criticism on *Collective Amnesia* has explored the role of knowledge, learning and memory in relation to history (Batra et al., Haith, Pieterse) and the role of water, especially the ocean, “as a metaphor for repressed historical trauma” (Burger 23). Some critics have also pointed to Putuma’s use of different (non-)lyric forms and devices to enhance the thematic concerns of the volume (Batra et al., Byrne, Pieterse). This article complements these analyses by taking a more profound interest in the ways in which these poets broaden poetry’s conventional generic boundaries by infusing their volumes with non-lyric modes. More than offer a simple extension of the existing scholarship on the individual volumes, this first comparative reading of *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* provides insight into the special affordances of multimodal poetry in criticising established systems of knowledge and learning. It explores how precisely the multimodality of their volumes enables Bernard and Putuma to write back to their respective countries’ (trans)national histories and propose a more inclusive understanding of their respective societies, with their diversification of the prevailing perceptions and discourses concerning these (trans)national histories and societies mirrored in their generic diversification of conventional poetry.

2. Multimodality in Jay Bernard’s *Surge*

Surge’s multimodality is directly linked to the archive, which is “central to both the aesthetic and political project” of the volume (Lawson Welsh 2). In her discussion of the archive in *Surge*, Sarah Lawson Welsh pointed out that ‘archive’ can refer to several concepts, namely

“‘archive’ as a repository, ‘archive’ as the physical place where records are stored, ‘archive’ as the totality of these records more generally (e.g. the archive of slavery) and ‘archive’ as a process of filing and recording which necessarily involves selection from a wider body of documentation and thus necessary exclusion and/or potential erasure or destruction of certain records” (Lawson Welsh 9–10).

Where Lawson Welsh focusses on the archive as textual inspiration in *Surge*, this article adds to the discussion by exploring the ways in which the inserted archival materials function in their interaction with individual poems and the volume as a whole. The volume's link with the archive becomes clear early on in the volume as it is perfused with archival materials, namely reproductions of a movie still of a sign (10), a poster (21), a photograph (27), a text message (33), a quote from a book (40), and a transcript from an interview excerpt (44). These materials are crucial to Bernard's poetic exploration of two fires in recent (Black) British history, as indicated by their rather even distribution throughout the volume – there are never more than seven poems between these archival materials – and their overall influence on, and interaction with, the volume. In their interaction with the poetic texts, the non-lyric materials take on a poetic function themselves. This poetic function notwithstanding, the archival materials are not included in the contents page.

Bernard's volume begins with an introductory "Author's Note", in which they shed light on the volume's genesis (i.e. a performance piece called *Surge: Side A* which Bernard wrote at the George Padmore Institute¹), provide some context surrounding the events of the New Cross Fire and its consequences and also make mention of the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush Scandal. The New Cross Fire, later renamed the New Cross Massacre, took place on 18 January 1981 in London's eponymous south-east area, when a fire broke out during Yvonne Ruddock's sixteenth birthday party, killing thirteen people between the ages of 14 and 22 and leaving many more injured.² Although the fire was believed to be a racist attack, as was supported by local history (Andrews), there is, to date, no official cause. This tragedy had far-reaching consequences as it inspired the Black People's Day of Action in 1981 and partially contributed to the infamous Brixton Riots. In a similar tragedy in 2017, a social housing tower in Grenfell (West London) caught fire, leaving over seventy dead, due to poor renovations and the use of highly flammable and combustible materials which "had been installed primarily to enhance the aesthetics of the building for the white wealthy people living in the surrounding area" (El-Enany). In their "Author's Note" Bernard establishes a link between both fires, commenting on "the lack of responsibility and the lack of accountability at the centre of both the New Cross Fire and Grenfell" (xi). As this "Author's Note" precedes the poems, readers of the volume are bound to come across it when starting the volume. Therefore, the "Author's Note" influences the readers' understanding and interpretation of the volume, allowing them to decode both (subtle) in-text references and the visual archival materials used in *Surge* (e.g. the poster mentions the New Cross Massacre by name) – as they will be (better) able to make connections between the volume and the historical events described in its "Author's Note".

Bernard reaffirms the crucial role the visuals play in *Surge* by disclosing their inclusion in the printed volume as a conscious decision on the poet's part, aimed at representing "the instant, the action and the victory" of a social movement (Marks and Bernard). The still of a sign outside Newcross Road can here be seen as the instant that set the New Cross Massacre Action Committee (NCMAC) and their social movement in motion, while the poster on the Black people's Day of Action refers quite directly to the action undertaken by the NCMAC and the photograph of the 1982 vigil provides us with a visual of their bittersweet victory as we see John La Rose walking hand-in-hand with friends and loved ones' of the victims who died in the fire, remembering them even when the press wouldn't (see also Andrews). While each of these visuals comments on specific moments in time surrounding the New Cross Massacre, they also interact with one another in ways that point to the long(er)-term consequences of the fire. The visuals become integral parts of the volume and take up both an authenticating and a poetic function of their own. The photograph of the vigil, for example, shows the "silent crowd" referred to in the preceding poem ("Washing", 26) and, in so doing, its visualisation enhances the sense of community that the poem evokes. The text of the poem, in turn, offers an emotive background against which to interpret the photograph. Bernard thus combines textual and visual modes to remember a forgotten, and possibly even consciously erased, part of (Black) British history. By inserting the archival materials into their poetry collection,

they draw attention to a tragic incident that, despite the fact that these materials are all publicly accessible at the GPI, has largely been overlooked.

Throughout *Surge*, the inclusion of visual materials is perhaps the most obvious use of multimodality. However, Bernard also uses textual elements in a multimodal manner to relate the stories of Grenfell and the Windrush Scandal, and to link these back to one another and to New Cross. Bernard makes the connection with Grenfell by inserting the transcript of an interview with Nazanin Aklani, the daughter of one of the Grenfell Fire victims, which originally aired on “BBC Newsnight, July 12 2017” (44). In this interview, the daughter deplores not having any remains of her mother to bury or identify and how this is even “more horrendous than being burned alive” (44). Here, the readers are reminded of the earlier complementary narrative poems “+” and “–”, which deal with the New Cross Fire and in which Bernard talks about the experience of a father having to identify his son’s burnt remains and of a son waiting on his father to come identify his remains, respectively (13, 14). In having the non-lyric mode of the interview echo earlier poetic texts and depict the same specific experience regarding both fires, Bernard establishes an emotive link between the horrors of New Cross, (re)presented and poetically reimagined in the poems “+” and “–”, and those of Grenfell, presented through the interview. According to Kate Potts, in so doing, they “shift[...] ‘personal’ truth into a broader, more public context” (113). The combination of lyric and non-lyric modes is crucial, as both the poems and the interview allow Bernard to connect the traumatising experiences of fires occurring at disparate moments in time. In the poems, Bernard opts for first-person speakers (father and son) whose accounts strongly resemble a stream of consciousness, creating the impression that their accounts are both lived experiences even though “–” is written from the dead son’s perspective and clearly poetically (re)imagined. The combination of first-person speakers and stream of consciousness not only lends more credibility to the speakers in their personal recollection of the New Cross fire; it also adds to the poem’s emotional impact on their readers. The interview about the Grenfell fire, likewise, is rooted in personal recollection and lived experience, lending a space for the daughter to share her perspective on the events and showing, as the poems do, how she is affected by the fire and its circumstances. With these multimodal resonances Bernard encourages their readers to establish connections between different critical moments in the history of (Black) Britain and understand the tragic continuation of Black Britain’s traumatisation.

Bernard also uses a multimodal approach in *Surge* to draw the readers’ attention to the Windrush Scandal and the problematic historiography of slavery. By inserting a quote from “C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*” (40, italics in original) into the volume – a book looking at neglected Black transexual narratives, tracing back understandings of gender as unstable by drawing on archival materials, including fugitive slave narratives – Bernard implicitly links the fires to other previously forgotten or overlooked (aspects of) Black histories. This is not the only moment in the volume when Bernard reflects Black Britain’s past, as the volume opens with a poem pleading with the readers to remember the horrors of the slave trade: “remember we were brought here from the clear waters of our dreams/ that we might be named, numbered and forgotten” (1). Both the poem and the Snorton quote point to histories of slavery; including each at different points in the volume indicates that, for Bernard, slavery is not a distant past event, but that its consequences are still present in contemporary Britain, showing up in the racial bias with which the New Cross and Grenfell fires were met. Having been published in 2017, quoting from Snorton’s book also contrast its recovery of overlooked histories with the 2017 Grenfell Fire, thus pointing to the continuous need for excavating forgotten parts of history.

However, while historiographic accounts like that of Snorton use photographs as visual proof, Bernard’s use of visual material is characterized by a vagueness. The visual materials are only explained in the “Notes”-section at the end of the volume, which leaves them open to the readers’ interpretation. In the “Notes”, Bernard offers bibliographical information, such as the date or the name of the photographer, as well as content-based information, namely what each image depicts.

They do this not only for inserted visual materials, but also for other archival material or other published texts used in the poems, either directly or as inspiration. While this section of the volume is included in the table of contents and immediately follows the poems, some readers may not be bothered to read on at this point and may be less likely to read it than the "Author's Note" that opens the volume. Furthermore, while the information presented in the "Notes" is important for a more contextualised understanding of the images (e.g. the photograph of the vigil is of family members of the New Cross Fire victims), and thus a more accurate understanding of the incident they depict, the images can still fulfil their informative function even without this additional knowledge, as the readers are able to fill in the gaps by means of the poems as well as prior knowledge (including information they have gleaned from the "Author's Note" and the volume's cover which briefly talks about the New Cross and Grenfell fires). The absence of on-page information about the photographs and the ensuing vagueness surrounding them increases the materials' poeticality while also reminding their readers that historiography relies heavily on processes of interpretation and the filling in of gaps. The lack of captions (typical of history books and other factual sources) makes the photographs more evocative, as it leaves more room for the reader to interpret these visuals.

Yet, while explanations for the visual images are only provided at the end of the volume in the "Notes", the explanations for the textual elements (text message, quote, transcript) are provided in footnotes at the bottom of their respective pages. Bernard's on-page referencing of the inserted textual archival materials through footnotes allows them to lend their volume a sense of authority often associated with academia. Even to those not working in the field, footnotes "are clear markers of an academic mode" (Hallet, "The Multimodal Novel" 130) of referencing the words of others that is generally used to corroborate one's own point or to provide additional thoughts or information. Their introduction in academic use "signalled an epistemological shift from credulous scholasticism to analytical and historical methodologies" (Senior 45), as a result of which footnotes have become signs of trustworthiness and authority. In *Surge*, footnotes are strictly bibliographical and, thus, contrast with the endnotes on the visual materials, which often offer more contextual information. The presence of the footnotes on the same page, moreover, makes them virtually impossible to ignore. Indeed, this on-page presence serves as an indication of "the significance of the notes and [as] an invitation to read [them] simultaneously and interactively with the poem" (Senior 45). Following academic conventions, readers will assume that the speaker in the quoted material is not the same as the speaker quoting these materials. Furthermore, while the speakers differ for each of the cited materials, the speaker in the footnote remains the same, thus framing the multivocal account of the quoted voices throughout the volume in one account, the annotation of the author-academic, which lends a sense of credibility and authority usually associated with academia to all speakers. Bernard's integration of the speakers in the author-academic's overarching discourse makes these individual voices converge in one collective voice through which the volume speaks (up/out), which, in turn, lends an additional sense of continuity to the volume as a whole. Indeed, it is only by looking at the volume in its entirety that its inclusion of different modes and speakers can be fully appreciated. By integrating the individual voices within the overarching discourse of the author-academic and by including materials from and about different periods in (Black) British history, ranging from slavery over the New Cross Massacre to the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush scandal, Bernard's multimodal poetry highlights that these are not isolated tragedies, but that they accumulate throughout (Black) British history. In so doing, the volume as a whole takes on a collective character, assuming a collective significance too powerful to ignore. This collective significance is also highlighted in Putuma's volume.

3. Multimodality in Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*

Similar to Bernard's *Surge*, Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* relies heavily on non-lyric modes, including lists and footnotes (Batra et al. 1112, Byrne 4–5, Pieterse 38–39). Drawing on and comple-

menting Annel Pieterse's analysis of Putuma's subversion of Eurocentric systems of knowledge through a decolonial lens, my article explores this aspect through a multimodal lens. It argues that the volume's "preoccupation with history and memory" (Batra et al. 1112) is not only thematically present, but also realised through Putuma's varied use of non-lyric modes associated with such systems, focussing especially on footnotes, different types of lists and interviews in selected poems.

The volume's concern with historical amnesia is already clear from its title. While critics and reviewers tend to place this collective amnesia within South Africa's (trans)national context (e.g. Burger, Haith, Phalalifa), Chelsea Haith points to the importance and potential necessity of the title's ambiguity as this raises the questions of "whose memory is being explored [...] and to and for whom the poet is speaking" (42) – a question that resurfaces throughout the volume. Similarly, the volume's division into three sections – "1. INHERITED MEMORY" (10–54), "2. BURIED MEMORY" (55–73), and "3. POSTMEMORY" (74–111) – draws attention to different ways of remembering the past (Haith 41). While these larger sections "centralise memory as a sum total of complex historical processes" (Phalalifa 251), Putuma's engagement with, and critique of, the colonality of knowledge³ also occurs on the level of the individual poem (see also Pieterse 39). However, it is the repetition of this multimodally achieved critique throughout the volume that effectuates Putuma's subversion of the colonality of knowledge.

A central means in this respect is Putuma's use footnotes. In her 'footnote poems', the poems' titles are accompanied by a superscripted number and the texts of these poems are written out as a single line in the footnote, leaving the rest of the page blank. Her use of footnotes allows Putuma to stylistically represent the 'colonality of knowledge'. While *Collective Amnesia* features five such footnote poems – "Storytelling", "Footnote", "Love", "Suicide", and "Apartheid" (11, 34, 46, 73, 109) – this section will focus on the first two as they exemplify how Putuma's use of footnotes and the content of the footnote poems are interwoven in her multimodal critique and subversion of Eurocentric systems of knowledge.

The first poem of the volume, "Storytelling^{1/} 1) How my people remember. How my people archive. How we inherit the world." (11), "cements [Putuma's] approach to knowledge firmly within the oral tradition" (Pieterse 39), but – through the poem's 'footnote' form – she immediately also confronts this oral tradition with the Eurocentric context of academic writing – a context which often excludes precisely the people Putuma is talking about and with whom she identifies, as her use of "we" indicates. The poem's speaker is literally reduced to the footnotes, as Pieterse (39) has also pointed out, but refusing to remain unheard. Furthermore, by relegating the poet-speaker and the text of the poem itself to the footnote, Putuma is inviting readers to question, if not outright abandon, Eurocentric systems of knowledge symbolised by the conventional academic use of footnotes and follow her to the margins instead. While there are very little indicators of who exactly this speaker is, readers conventionally assume the author to be the speaker in the footnotes.

The emerging blank page in Putuma's footnote poems can be read as a stylistic representation of the silence with which histories from the margins are often met and to which they are relegated. In "Storytelling", this blank page is representative of the silence/silencing on/of "[Putuma's] people" (Putuma 11). In "Footnote", which reads "2) Some poems show up to undo your silence." (34), this blank page can be read as precisely the silence the footnote poems show up to undo. Whose silence is referred to depends less on who is speaking (although the speaker is literally and presumably also figuratively situated in the margins), and more on who is being addressed. On the one hand, we could consider the addressed 'you' as (someone from) the centre, arguing that these poems speak up against the centre's collective amnesia. On the other hand, we could also consider this 'you' as (someone from) the margins, with the poems speaking on their behalf. While the result is similar (undoing the silence on/of the margins), this difference in potential interpretations of the addressee assures the poem's emotional impact on the readers who, whether from the centre or from the margins, can identify with this 'you' and thus feel directly addressed.

Putuma not only represents the silence(s) in history through these blank pages, her 'footnote poems' also break these silences in and through the footnotes, which are literally undoing the silences on the margins *form* the margins. This is most evident in "Footnotes", whose self-reflexive title already highlights Putuma's use of footnotes in/as poems. Indeed, her "invocation of the footnote [can be seen] a decolonial play" which helps Putuma "oppos[e] the privileging of the printed word in Eurocentric culture" (Pieterse 39; Byrne 4–5).

Lists form another example of Putuma's use of multimodality in *Collective Amnesia*; in her list poems, as in her footnote poems, Putuma criticises and subverts the 'coloniality of knowledge'. Lists abound in *Collective Amnesia*: almost one in five poems either in its entirety appears as a list or contains one or more lists.⁴ These lists include bullet lists ("No Easter Sunday for Queers", "Oh Dear God, Please Not Another Rape Poem" (25–33, 89–93)), numbered lists ("Twenty-One Ways of Leaving", "In the Emergency Room" (39–45, 66)), a combination thereof ("Black Solidarity" (80–82)), a list of dictionary entries ("Teachings" (78)), a list of meanings of a term ("Pharisee", (78)), and a list of names ("Lifeline" (83–85)).

"Teachings", for instance, features entries on "*writing* (n): a doctrine used to deliver one from the ills of silencing" and "*archiving* (v): a FUCK YOU to the canon" (79, italics in original), which demonstrate that, once again, Putuma is taking formats associated with a traditional Eurocentric systems of knowledge, the dictionary, and subverts their coloniality by providing critical comments on these systems' silences and, more importantly, on how to undo them. It is no coincidence that the terms Putuma expands on – 'transparency', 'talk', 'writing', 'share', 'publishing' and 'archiving' – all have to do with practices of passing on knowledge and with academia and historiography specifically. The final term, 'archiving', also refers back to the first poem, "Storytelling", where the latter was described as "[h]ow my people archive", making storytelling and her people's way of remembering "a FUCK YOU to the canon" as well (11, 79). In linking these poems thematically, Putuma also allows for their modes to interact, thus establishing a link between her multimodal use of footnotes and lists to write back to systems of knowledge and to undo their silence(s).

This multimodal focus on writing back to systems of knowledge can also be seen in "Oh Dear God, Please Not Another Rape Poem" (89–93), which is about an 'Uncle' who – as is known in the family – is a sexual predator, but they ignore it because "*some family members would rather describe the smoke than smell like it*" (89, italics in original). While this poem thematizes 'collective amnesia' that occurs at the level of the family, the form of this poem resembles that of an academic paper. Tying its discussion of familial amnesia back to Eurocentric systems of knowledge and their silences, the poem has been split into six sections – "PREFACE", "INTRODUCTION", "BODY", "CONCLUSION", "ADDENDUM", and "REFERENCE LIST/BIBLIOGRAPHY" – which typically structure an academic paper. The last section's title especially is a reference to academia and the importance the latter attaches to acknowledging others' contributions – a significant choice when writing back to Eurocentric systems of knowledge and their silences. The poem ends on a list of imperatives such as "*Hug uncle*", "*Stop being antisocial*", and "*Sit on uncle's lap*" (93, italics in original). The suggestion that 'uncle' is a sexual predator makes this list of instructions highly problematic. The family's silence attains an extra layer of meaning in a South African context, implicitly relating to how the memories of the historical period of slavery "have been comprehensively suppressed by 'shame' of that enslavement and sexual exploitation" (Burger 16), and to the "continuing (and often suppressed) influence of South Africa's colonial and more recent apartheid past" (16). Hence, Putuma's use of academic modes of writing criticises systems of power, responsibility, and knowledge both in a private, familial context and in a larger (trans)national one.

A third non-lyric mode that Putuma employs in her poems is that of the interview, which, like the footnotes and lists, "evokes the methodologies of Western knowledge frames" (Pieterse 41) only to reflect on the coloniality of Eurocentric systems of knowledge. The aptly titled poem "Interview" (76–77) can be divided into two parts: On the left page, there is a single question with a detailed

answer by someone from the margins who identifies as a “black womxn” (76). On the right page, there are three questions, followed by “A:” and a blank page (77), which, similarly to the blank page in her footnote poems can be read as a stylistic representation of silence. While the first question reads “Why are you always murdering our narratives with your gaze” (77), the silence or blank page as answer can be read as this gaze, as a way of answering with/within their silence. However, if the question is read as being asked from the margins, the silence takes on a different meaning, then denoting an inability to answer, a refusal to do so, or, the oppressive silence with which the histories from the margin are often met. This latter reading would be in line with the meaning of the blank page in Putuma’s footnote poems. However, the blank page, which is made possible through the incorporation of the interview as a mode, can be read in a more interactive manner as well, namely that it denotes a gap (silence) the volume invites the readers to fill. In this way, the blank invites readers from the margin to provide their own answers, while it could also incite people from the centre to consider their privilege and reflect on these questions. This ambiguity resonates not only with the ambiguity of the volume’s title, but also with that of the ‘you’ in “Footnote”, which potentially allows both readers from the margin and those from the centre to feel directly addressed. Once again, Putuma’s critique of Eurocentric systems of knowledge is made possible precisely by her multimodal adoption of forms related to these systems.

4. Conclusion: *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* as Multimodal Poetry Volumes

Despite their volumes’ shared thematic and formal concerns, namely their use of multimodality in writing back to, and undoing the silence in/on the authors’ respective (trans)national histories, Bernard and Putuma’s use of multimodality in *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* differs in three main regards: 1) Bernard and Putuma apply different modes, 2) they deploy the same modes in different manners and 3) the multimodality takes on different meanings, or has different effects. The difference in modes is partially due to the fact that *Surge*’s multimodality is rooted in the archive, whereas *Collective Amnesia*’s multimodality is rooted in Eurocentric systems of knowledge, especially academia. Bernard’s use of visual archival material has a double purpose; it serves both authenticating and poetic functions, allowing Bernard to make visible forgotten parts of (Black) British history with a sense of authority, while also enabling them to establish a link between different events in (Black) British history – one long past, the other contemporary. In doing so, multimodality’s interconnectivity acquires a political meaning, revealing the continuity of institutional racism in Britain. Putuma’s multimodal use of lists in *Collective Amnesia* is equally political as her adoption of formats associated with Eurocentric systems of knowledge, especially academia, allows her to question precisely these systems. The differences in their use of the same modes, then, can be seen in how directly they incorporate these modes. Where Bernard incorporates modes more or less directly, which then take on poetic functions, Putuma adapts and poetically repurposes them *as poems*. This is closely tied to the differences in the meaning or effects of their multimodality. Where Bernard systematically deploys multimodality to lend their poetry volume a sense of authority with which to write back to and about the histories that *Surge* deals with (especially the New Cross Fire, the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush Scandal), Putuma systematically repurposes forms associated with authority and credibility to question precisely these concepts in relation to systems of knowledge and to subvert the ‘coloniality of knowledge’. While Bernard uses footnotes to write back to historical amnesia with authority, Putuma, conversely, questions, if not outright rejects, footnotes’ association with credibility and authority. Bernard employs footnotes *as footnotes*, according to academic conventions, to provide bibliographical information on the inserted textual archival materials. Their use of footnotes allows them to bring into the volume an author-academic who is speaking from and in those footnotes and whose overarching discourse brings together the individual voices of the different poems’ lyric speakers, lending the resulting collective voice the sense of authority usually associated with academia (rather than poetry – which often has a more subjective connotation).

Putuma, on the other hand, uses footnotes *as poems* and, thus, poetically repurposes the mode she incorporates. In her footnote poems, both the footnotes and the blank space they create subvert the 'coloniality of knowledge' by undoing the silence(s) within Eurocentric systems of knowledge. In short, Putuma questions the very systems that inform Bernard's incorporation of non-lyric modes (e.g. photographs, interviews, footnotes) and allow them to poetically explore, reimagine and build on the archive and/as history with a sense of authority. Putuma's poetically repurposed academic modes (e.g. dictionary entries, Q&A, footnotes), by contrast, question and subvert these systems and their perceived authority. *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* thus use (academic) modes in different ways to achieve a similar result: exposing, questioning, and undoing silences in the authors' respective (trans)national histories.

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Notes

- ¹ The George Padmore Institute (GPI) is "an archive, library and research centre dedicated to radical black history in Britain" (Bernard ix). The archive holds a collection specifically on the New Cross Fire and the surrounding events ("George Padmore Institute").
- ² The victims were: Andrew Goodling, Owen Thompson, Patricia Johnson, Patrick Cummings, Steve Collins, Lloyd Hall, Humphrey Brown, Lillian Roselind Henry, Peter Campbell, Gerry Paul Francis, Glen Powell, Paul Ruddock, and Yvonne Ruddock. Two and a half years later, Anthony Berbeck, one of the survivors, took his own life and became the fourteenth victim. ("New Cross Massacre Campaign, 1980-1985")
- ³ The coloniality of knowledge "denotes the ways in which Eurocentric knowledge systems are privileged over other knowledge systems" (Pieterse 36).
- ⁴ The recent state of the art on lists in literature discusses their role in a narrative context specifically (see Richardson 2016, Von Contzen 2016). A proper discussion of lists in a lyric context requires further research.

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City Lyrics in a “Sensible Age”: Intermediality and Intersensoriality in Oscar Wilde’s ‘*Impression Du Matin*’ (1881) and “Symphony in Yellow” (1889)

ESZTER GYORGY

Abstract: This paper examines the cross-fertilization between different art forms in two of Oscar Wilde’s city lyrics: ‘*Impression du Matin*’ (1881) and “Symphony in Yellow” (1889). These impressionistic poems epitomise Wilde’s synaesthetic sensibility and transformative intertextuality whereby the poet translates his visual and aural experiences into poetry. The paper also investigates the functions of intermediality in Wilde’s aesthetic and ideological standpoint, and demonstrates how the Wildean dandy figure, aligned with the Baudelairean “painter of modern life”, conveys his perception of metropolitan modernity in these two poems of intermedial significance.

Keywords: Oscar Wilde, intermediality, synaesthesia, metropolis, dandy

As Wilde writes in “Pen, Pencil and Poison: A Study in Green” (1885), “in a very ugly and sensible age, the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other” (Dowling and Wilde 203). Accordingly, Wilde frequently makes use of the cross-disciplinary potential of different art forms to influence each other. This paper will analyse the complex synaesthetic interrelations of painting and music in two impressionistic poems, ‘*Impression du Matin*’ (1881) and “Symphony in Yellow” (1889). Although the notion of intermediality is a later construct, it will be argued that Wilde already pioneers the use of different media in translating his impressions of Victorian London into poetic cityscapes. Specifically, the paper focuses on the intermedial presence of James McNeill Whistler’s paintings in Wilde’s city lyrics. Investigating the functions of intermediality in Wilde’s aesthetic and ideological standpoint will lead me to a discussion of the figure of the cosmopolitan dandy-*flâneur*. The Wildean dandy depicts his urban experience as an acute observer of the *fin-de-siècle* Victorian milieu, and transmits his- often subversive- vision of contemporary London society in the two poems through the use of different media.

As W. J. T. Mitchell observes, there is no such thing as a ‘pure medium’- “all arts are composite arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media” (qtd. in Rippl 20). The umbrella term “intermediality” refers to the border-crossing between different media. Challenging media boundaries is made possible by the affordances of transmediality (Bruhn and Schirmacher 12). In other words, sharing transmedial features fosters intermedial translation between various media. The shared characteristics, however, manifest themselves in very different ways in various media on account of the constraints imposed by medium specificity. The interplay between Wilde’s use of transmediality and medium specificity provides a key interpretative framework to offer a new understanding of the way the Wildean dandy transmits his aesthetic principles. Wilde’s poetry acts as an interface between different media that cooperate in channelling the dandy’s aesthetic perception and cosmopolitan experience.

In his complex, intermedial city lyrics, Wilde has recourse to the fields of poetry, visual art and music, exploiting the dynamics of synaesthesia as a literary device. Synaesthesia consists in describing a sensation in terms of another sensation. Through a blending of the senses, the stimulation of one modality (e.g.: seeing) simultaneously produces sensation in a different modality (e.g.: hearing). In the two poems under study, Wilde translates his visual and aural experiences into the language of poetry. Essentially, Whistler’s paintings for Wilde are the source medium he converts into poems. Therefore, these poems are instances of extracompositional intermediality, or more specifically intermedial transposition (Wolf 131).

Drawing on the Paterian aesthetics of music as the supreme art form, an important medium is music in Wilde’s impressionistic lyrics. Music contextualises Wilde’s metropolitan poems in the wider framework of the aesthete’s impressionistic poetry. Smulders observes that the sections “Wind Flowers”, “Flowers of Gold”, *‘Impressions du Théâtre’* and “The Fourth Movement” in Wilde’s volume of *Poems* take the shape of a classical symphony. The first two movements are in sonata-allegro form, but the second one is slower in tempo. The sprightly third *scherzo* is then followed by a fourth movement or finale (Smulders 289). Music and sound effects can also be revealed in the individual poems: Wilde has recourse to Tennyson’s stanzaic form in most of his pictorial impressions. He adopts the *redondilla*, an envelope quatrain composed of tetrameter lines rhyming A-B-B-A (Smulders 289). The *redondilla* is significant in the relationship of sound and image given its symmetry creating a poetic framing technique for these cityscapes capturing fleeting impressions of beauty within the metropolis, as if they were impressionistic paintings.

‘Impression du Matin’, first published in the *World*, begins the sequence “Wind Flowers” in *Poems* (1881, 1882), establishing a key note for the sonata-allegro movement (Smulders 289). This four-stanza meditation on the beauty of modernity is a piece of synaesthetic literature, mingling our senses and providing a fleeting impression of an urban landscape in Victorian London. Always in quest of new sensations, the speaker’s engagement with beauty becomes clear through the aesthetic evocation of metropolitan images, such as the fog and the gaslight, recalling the imagery of “The Decay of Lying” (1891):

Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? [...] At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. [...] They did not exist till Art had invented them (Dowling and Wilde 184).

The above passage is crucial to interpret intermediality in *‘Impression du Matin’*, since the essay exemplifies the Wildean principle of Life imitating Art. Wilde here deploys the device of *quaesitio* through a series of rhetorical questions in order to expose his views on the relationship between Art and Life. The extract’s plethora of cascading questions imitates the flow of the poem whereby the “yellow fog came creeping down the bridges”, and, by way of an *enjambement*, the entire composition. As a literary *collage* made up of a number of intertextual echoes, the essay shares a common lexical field with *‘Impression du Matin’*. The recurrent urban imagery of the fog and “the gas-lamp’s flare” does not only shine a light on the importance of Wilde’s perception of modernity, but it also demonstrates how Wilde’s early poem affirms the ideas later proposed in his essay. If Life imitates Art, then the dandy’s metropolitan experience is moulded in the poetical representation of the London cityscape. Nevertheless, the relationship between the poem and the essay is even more complex, since the source medium for the poem, as it will be demonstrated, is Whistler’s painting. Ultimately, Wilde’s poetry and prose borrow elements from Whistler’s art and transpose his painting into the medium of literature. Again, as voiced in “Pen, Pencil and Poison”, the arts borrow from each other.

The poem clearly inscribes itself into the impressionist tradition, given the French title and its paratextual connections evoking Monet's *'Impression, soleil levant'* ("Impression, sunrise", 1872, 1. Figure). The painting represents a hazy *Le Havre* harbour with the vague shapes of boats in the background and the redness of the rising sun. The horizon seems to have disappeared; sky and water have become one, the hues of clouds, mist and sea are merged together in the foggy morning harbour. Among the impressionists, it was Whistler who embodied, for Wilde, the very essence of "cosmopolitan intellectual sophistication" (Sturgis 178). Wilde and Whistler were neighbours in Tite Street, Chelsea which was the geographical epicentre of the new "aesthetic craze" they represented (Cox 71). Situated on the edge of the expanding London city, between the age-old King's Road and the Thames, Tite street and the bohemian inhabitants of its independent studio-houses would soon challenge the values of the age and embody a new aesthetic art and architecture well into the twentieth century (Cox 28). Although Wilde complained that Tite street was a rather "horrid address", in the "Keats House", as he called it, "he was at the centre of an artistic *milieu* that both nurtured and defined his own identity as an aesthete" (Cox 88). The new intellectual and artistic epoch that originally began in Paris eventually developed in that quarter of Victorian London.



Fig. 1. *'Impression, soleil levant'* by Claude Monet, 1872

'Impression du Matin' epitomises the influence of Whistler's impressionism on Wilde's poetry. Whistler, like the ageing Turner, also found himself "drawn to the murky, misty, mysterious Thames" (Cox 25). This is where his eerie, serene *Nocturnes* were born. Capturing the momentariness of metropolitan experience by the river Thames would soon become an obsession for him. Reverting to the "pure and unpolluted art of Japan", Whistler struggled to "successfully combine the ethereal Japanese style with the grim reality of London" (Cox 25). The eccentric American painter ended up in a notorious lawsuit which hit the headlines in 1878. His 1875 painting entitled "Nocturne in Black and Gold- the Falling Rocket" (2. Figure) was displayed in 1877 in the Grosvenor Gallery which warmly welcomed paintings rejected by the Royal Academy. Wilde reviewed the painting in *The Dublin Magazine*, and described it as "certainly worth looking at for about as long as one looks at a real rocket, that is, for somewhat less than a quarter of a minute" (qtd. in Cox 88).

The painting triggered an indignant complaint of John Ruskin's who, in his review for the *Fors Clavigera*, apostrophised Whistler's art as "wilful imposture" and "never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face" (qtd. in Cox 54). The subsequent conflict culminated in a trial. To Whistler, the fight against Ruskin was "the fight be-

tween the brush and the pen” (qtd. in Killeen 98). The painter won the trial which turned out to be a triumph defending his artistic principles. The collision has significant resonances in a Wildean fairy tale titled “The Remarkable Rocket” (1888). Besides hinting at the “verbal fireworks” between Ruskin and Whistler, Wilde may have alluded to his own personal conflict with Whistler in the fairy tale, since the painter accused him of “stealing his best lines and making money out of their relationship” (Killeen 98). Their turbulent friendship was “fuelled by a combination of admiration, jealousy, and acute narcissism” (Cox 87).



Fig. 2. “Nocturne in Black and Gold- The Falling Rocket” by Whistler (1875)

Whistler’s influence on the genesis of *Impression du Matin* is clear, since the subtle nuances of his painting titled “Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge” (1872, 3. Figure) are translated into poetry through the synaesthetic depiction of the Thames at dawn. The reader of *Impression du Matin* is confronted with the depiction of a visual artwork instead of the possibility to contemplate the cityscape itself. Therefore, the poem also represents a type of *ekphrasis*. As Clüver defines it, *ekphrasis* is “the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (qtd. in Bruhn and Schirmacher 148). The poem is not so much the depiction of the early morning London, but rather that of a painting which grasps that fleeting moment. The scene is thus intermedially translated through two media (Wagner and de Gruyter 286). Due to the poem’s ekphrastic values, the urban impression is first perceived by means of a painterly representation, and only then is it translated indirectly into the language of poetry. Moreover, Whistler’s nocturnal riverscapes are themselves complex iconotexts, drawing on Chopin’s musical cascades and Ando Hiroshige’s (1797–1858) Tokaido woodcuts depicting bridges (Wagner and de Gruyter 287, 4. Figure). Whistler played a decisive role in spreading Japonism in England (Schlombs and Andô 87), and Wilde had already seen a revelatory exhibition on Japanese art at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris as early as 1867.

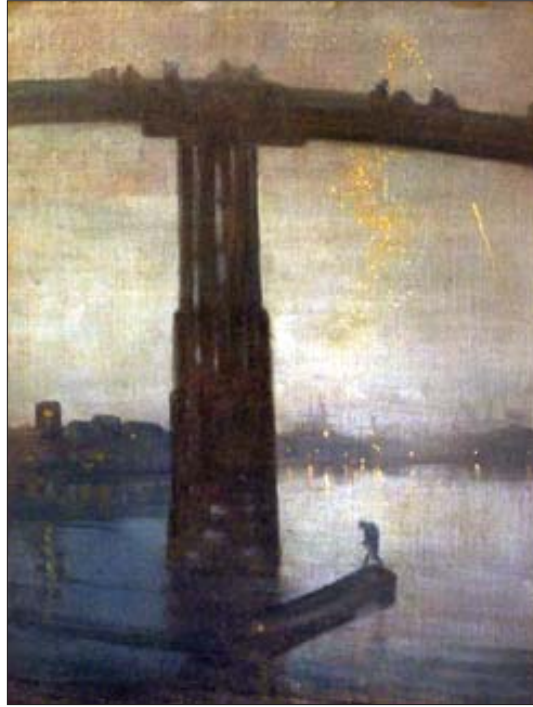


Fig. 3. "Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge" by Whistler (1872)



Fig. 4. "Man on horseback crossing a bridge" by Hiroshige (1835-1837)

In the depiction of ephemeral urban landscapes, both Whistler and Wilde capture the beauty of what they perceive as modernity. Whistler's painting technique using quick, loose brushstrokes to capture the momentariness of impression gets into verbal expression in Wilde's *Impression du Matin*. The poem deploys the intersensory representation of fugitive moments in the metropolitan cityscape with the explicit mention of the terms "nocturne" and "harmony". In the initial harmony of the poem, an ironic pun can be revealed: Wilde, an admirer, but at the same time a jealous artist-friend of Whistler's, was in the habit of mocking the painter. As Whistler often changed the title of his paintings, the first two lines of the poem poke fun at the painter:

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
 Changed to a harmony in gray

Furthermore, the mention of “nocturne” and “harmony” is an example of explicit reference or intermedial thematization, since media other than literature are overtly mentioned in the poem. Breaking down the constraints of medium specificity and exploiting the possibilities of transmediality, Wilde takes one step further. By using the term “nocturne” in his poem, he immediately unifies the visual and the aural. On the one hand, “nocturne” is a painting of a night scene, but it is also a soft, dreamy, meditative piece of music. The synaesthetic marrying of sound and picture is in accordance with the Horatian *ut pictura poesis* (“as in painting, so in poetry”), which constitutes the governing principle of the poem. Nevertheless, instead of *competing* against each other, poetry and the visual arts coexist and cooperate within the poem in order to convey Wilde’s aesthetic ideas.

It is striking to see how the aesthete contemplates “beauty in the material products of imperialist excess, industrial contamination, and social inequity” (Smulders 288). In Wilde’s poetic depiction of the yellow fog creeping down the bridges over the Thames, the different hues and nuances of the colour yellow powerfully pervade the poem: the barge with ochre-coloured hay evokes Monet’s series of ‘*Meules*’ (“Haystacks”, 1890–1891), while the yellow fog is creeping down the entire city, and, through an *enjambement*, the whole poem.

The yellow fog came creeping down
 The bridges, till the houses’ walls
 Seemed changed to shadows, and St. Paul’s
 Loomed like a bubble o’er the town.

The explicit mention of the synaesthetic term “harmony”, the metrical pattern of iambic tetrameter and the simplistic, paratactic sentence-structure establish a state of harmony in the first three stanzas. Nonetheless, the animal-nature of the creeping yellow fog and the “shadows” create an uncanny sensation of general unease. To this effect contributes the use of expressions suggesting uncertainty, such as “seemed changed” and “loomed”. This stanza already foreshadows the spectral appearance of a lonely woman in stanza 4.

The initial harmony is dramatically perturbed by the approaching dawn. In the last stanza, the sexually sensitive male-gaze suddenly catches sight of the silhouette of a loitering woman.

But one pale woman all alone,
 The daylight kissing her wan hair,
 Loitered beneath the gas-lamp’s flare,
 With lips of flame and heart of stone.

The contrasting conjunction “but” and the hypotaxis used upset the harmony of the poem (Wagner and de Gruyter 290). In metrical terms, the trochaic inversions anticipate the appearance of femininity not only in the form of the approaching dawn, but also in the figure of the pale woman. Wilde notes in “The Critic as Artist” (1891) “the immoral effeminacy of using trochaic and tribrachic movements” in writing, since these measures ending with weak syllables were deemed effeminate in the nineteenth century (Dowling and Wilde 358). Accordingly, the trochees appearing in the midst of a regular iambic rhythm upset the prosodic harmony of ‘*Impression du Matin*’, and foreground a substantial change in the choreographics of looking from a panoramic view of the city to the *premier-plan* representation of the lonely woman. “Her image, like a fading but prolonged echo of nocturnal pleasures” spoils the harmony of the early morning scene (Boyiopoulos 1029). Moreover, with the alarming presence of dawn, a jarring shift in perspective can also be revealed: we move from the detached perspective of an observer to a voyeuristic glimpse into the London *demi-monde*, coupled with a moralising tone. The speaker paradoxically voices a value judgement on the loitering woman through the use of derogatory vocabulary. The conspicuous image of her “lips of flame”,

sensually echoing the act of “kissing” referred to in the second line of this stanza, is in sharp contrast with the dull, grey, mundane reality of modern London. While the “lips of flame” would certainly not pass unnoticed in the greyness of the city, the invisible “heart of stone” is transformed into a significant metaphor indicating emotional cruelty. The “heart of stone” epitomises the sex-worker’s overexhaustion in her routine and incapacity for love. The evaluative language of these specific attributes raises important questions. Does the speaker know the woman described? Otherwise, how can he presume that she has a “heart of stone”?

According to Wagner, the poem inscribes itself into Victorian misogynistic male discourse on femininity which “turns the female body into a potentially dangerous object of religious-erotic desire” (296). Certainly, “the daylight kissing her wan hair” confers grace by suggesting a halo, but the final metaphors position the woman as street-walker (Smulders 293). Despite the apparent intimacy between the observer and the woman, it can be argued that, instead of suggesting a misogynistic undercurrent, the focalizer’s use of such *clichéd* language as “heart of stone” undermines the traditional male bourgeois ethos of contemporary Victorian period. The observer in the last stanza denigrates contemporary male discourse on femininity, paradoxically adopting, for a moment, the angle of vision of Victorian masculinity through the use of hackneyed language. From the viewpoint of the modern reader, Wilde could have enclosed the expressions “lips of flame” and “heart of stone” in inverted commas, indicating the subversive shift in poetic diction.

The description of the sex-worker becomes at once an acute critique of contemporary society and a rejection of utilitarianism. The cosmetics, makeup and decorative jewellery used by the woman for purposes of self-display and seduction imply that, by a metonymical shift between the red lips and the “prostitute”, the woman herself becomes a commodity. Challenging the notion of woman as commodity, the dandy himself is, through his self-conscious artificiality, refinement of taste and exotic connoisseurship, dependent on the very commodities of capitalist consumerism. Distinguishing himself from the dull, mundane mediocrity of contemporary society, he thrives in the very *milieu* the values of which he subversively criticises (Felski 99). The scarlet lips, golden hair and paleness may as well refer to the figure of the ephebe, incarnating Wilde’s aesthetic ideal of male beauty. Even if the sex-worker is apostrophised as a “woman” in the poem, the attributes suggest ambiguity of gender. The terms “loitering” and “all alone” are parts of a shared semantic field between *Impression du Matin* and Wilde’s later decadent poem “The Harlot’s House” (1885) depicting the nocturnal activity of the moonlit street. In *Impression du Matin*, the poet deals with the “prostitute” as a type. Wilde subversively reflects upon the deplorable condition of marginal elements of modern society. Compared to the medium specificity and the specific pictorial affordances of Whistler’s art, the poetical power of language and the possibilities offered by transmediality enable Wilde to tell even more about society than Whistler in his painting.

Nevertheless, to the limits of medium specificity, “Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge” and *Impression du Matin* share common leitmotifs. The painting’s almost monochromatic colour palette evokes the monotony of life in the modern metropolis. Similarly, the poem’s lexical field echoes the technical jargon of Victorian London. The gas-lamp epitomises the greatest technical advance at the time, and the vocabulary of gas-lighting creates *l’effet de réel*. Although Wilde later objects to literary realism in his “Intentions” (1891), he describes elements with striking topographical precision even in his impressionistic poetry with explicit references to the river Thames and important landmarks, such as Saint Paul’s Cathedral, a symbol of the growing metropolis.

Another significant shared point of reference is the motif of the bridge anchoring both the poem and the painting in the context of Victorian sexual-politics. The bridges over the Thames (and especially Waterloo Bridge, also known as the “Bridge of Sighs”) are a prevalent literary *topos* of female suicide and represent the *locus classicus* of fictional suicide scenes (Nicoletti). Thomas Hood’s 1844 poem titled “The Bridge of Sighs” focuses on the tragic immediacy of a “prostitute’s” suicidal leap into the river Thames. The woman’s unknown and dubious past conveys a sense of perplexity

and makes Hood’s poem a possible intertext to Wilde’s *‘Impression du Matin’* and Whistler’s painting. Wilde, Whistler and even Hood aestheticize the objects of contemplation. They capture what is beautiful; the young, lonely and abandoned, nameless casualties of society are the objects of their scrutiny. As Nicoletti remarks, “the moral sewer” of the Thames is the metaphor of London’s “urban depravity” in contemporary poetry and visual arts (Nicoletti).

The image of the pallid woman is another common motif in those representations. The pale woman in Wilde’s *‘Impression du Matin’* evokes Théophile Gautier’s *‘Symphonie en Blanc Majeur’* in *‘Emaux et Camées’* (1852) as a poetic intertext. Wilde’s poetic impressions are much indebted to Gautier’s symphonic poem, “that flawless masterpiece of colour and music” (Raby and Wilde 65), not merely for its music, but also for the intermediality of the colour white traditionally associated with innocence and purity. This is significant, since it demonstrates how literary and pictorial media are unified in *‘Impression du Matin’*. Behind the subtle depiction of pallid white women in Gautier’s poem, the emotional cruelty of the *femme fatale* can be revealed. Likewise, in Wilde’s *‘Impression du Matin’* the “pale woman” is endowed with a “heart of stone” suggesting her cruelty. The perplexing plethora of enumerations and the amplification of *quaesitio* create considerable tension in Gautier’s *‘Symphonie’*. The puzzling enigma of Gautier’s white ladies culminates in a powerful oxymoron “*implacable blancheur*” (“whiteness sans merci” in Timothy Adès’s translation).

Who shall melt that heart’s repose,
thaw its ice-bound reverie,
introduce a tint of rose
in that whiteness sans merci?

The theme of the *femme fatale* as the erotically menacing object of the *fin-de-siècle* male gaze in the London *demi-monde* is a prevalent *topos* in Victorian literature (Wagner and de Gruyter 280). With regard to the intermedial significance of the colour white, Whistler’s 1862 painting titled “Symphony in White No.1: The White Girl” (1862, 5. Figure) is attested to have been “the most beautiful painting Wilde had ever seen” (Sturgis 229). This painting would establish the new aesthetic school, a “fleshy school” which represented in England the new breed of art first conceived in Paris (Cox 18). “The White Girl looked almost sickly with the pale, virginal Joanna Hiffernan standing upon a ruggedly masculine wolf-skin, with its fierce teeth projecting out of the frame” (Cox 16).



Fig. 5. “Symphony in White No.1: The White Girl” by Whistler (1862)

The *fin-de-siècle* male gaze centred on the image of the *femme fatale* and the importance of the focalizer in *Impression du Matin* lead me to a discussion of the dandy-*flâneur* as a discursive literary figure creating a singular perspective on the modern world surrounding him. The dandy as a type is a key figure to decipher the functions of the poem's intermediality. In his 1863 essay, *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* ("The Painter of Modern Life"), Charles Baudelaire theorizes the notion of the artist as a "man of the world" (qtd. in Davis and Dierkes-Thrun 2). Davis's observation of the Wildean dandy as the embodiment of the Baudelairean "man of the world" supports my argument that the cosmopolitan figure of the dandy is an omniscient outsider who creates a unique perspective in poetry. He contemplates the city "with a certain spirit of inquiry that Baudelaire specifies as curiosity" (Davis and Dierkes-Thrun 2). As Baudelaire observes:

the word 'dandy' implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of all the moral mechanisms of this world; but, from another aspect, the dandy aspires to cold detachment, and it is in this way that [he] who is dominated, if ever anyone was, by an insatiable passion, that of seeing and feeling, parts company trenchantly with dandyism (Baudelaire 18).

Due to his intellectual curiosity, this peculiar "kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness" (Davis and Dierkes-Thrun 3) scrutinizes the city tinged with yellowish decadent tones in "Symphony in Yellow" (1889) to expose his metropolitan experience. As opposed to *Impression du Matin*, "Symphony in Yellow" belongs to a later, less prolific but even more accomplished decadent phase of Wilde's poetry. It was first published in the *Centennial Magazine: An Australasian Monthly Illustrated* and echoes *Impression du Matin* in its evocation of central London. "Symphony in Yellow" also synaesthetically mingles music and the heraldic colour of decadence, as its title suggests. In "Symphony in Yellow", the dandy's powerful presence as a discursive literary figure epitomises his heightened sensibility which lies at the very heart of his personality. In *Impression du Matin*, the importance of visual and aural perception gets into expression primarily through Wilde's aesthetic predilection and fascination with Whistler's painting. While in that early poem, the dandy's preoccupation with aesthetic form and pictorialism are prevalent, in "Symphony in Yellow", the darker shadows of sensual Decadence would become much more pronounced.

At the intersection of Aestheticism and the culture of male homosexuality in Victorian London, the dandy celebrates beauty and the triumph of artifice over nature. The dandy's paraphernalia of the "silken scarf" and the "rod of rippled jade" are a *recherché* catalogue of his connoisseurship. Through a metonymical shift of self-conscious aesthetic representation, the figure of the dandy is artificially impersonated in the poem. As Felski observes, "impersonation and disguise were often obligatory techniques of survival for the late-nineteenth-century homosexual rather than simply markers of adherence to a fashionable aesthetic philosophy" (104). Calloway asserts that the dandy's quintessential feature is "creating oneself afresh each day as a work of art" (Raby and Wilde, Ch. 3, 51). The dandy's self-fashioning is in accordance with "the burning desire to create a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions" (Baudelaire 44). The jade, as a precious stone, is a symbol of the dandy's refinement of taste, acquisitiveness and hedonistic excess. More broadly, jewelled imagery and gemstone texture are omnipresent in Wilde's writing. There is a "dialectical playfulness between fixing the impression through permanent, precious materials, and destabilising it through tropes of change" (Boyiopoulos 1035). The juxtaposition of telescopic similes and the insect analogies implied are not only examples of "elegant artifice", but also allude to "fragility, slowness and transience" (Smulders 295).

An omnibus across the bridge
Crawls like a yellow butterfly,
And, here and there, a passer-by
Shows like a little restless midge.

Wilde's pioneering telescopic impressionism captures life in the modern city through gemstones, precious minerals and insects. The extensive use of insect-imagery and its aural connotations, and

more specifically the “restless midge”, elucidate a claustrophobic sense of alienation in the hustle and bustle of the city, echoing Baudelaire’s invocation of Paris in *‘Les Sept Vieillards’* (1857):

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams,
Where specters in broad day accost the passer-by!

With the evocation of the crowded metropolis, Wilde’s “Symphony in Yellow” immediately summons the figure of the Baudelairean dandy. The dandy’s complex kaleidoscopic vision of the city enables him to observe, evaluate, analyse and judge the ideas and values of a given world from the angle of vision of an outsider. His genuine interest in alterity and free cosmopolitan spirit render him more than just an idle loiterer in the streets of *fin-de-siècle* bohemian Paris, the fancy drawing rooms of Victorian England, the exotic brothels of Algeria or amidst the archaeological remnants and departed glories of the irretrievable Classical past. As an outsider, he is an active observer.

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird’s, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite (Baudelaire 19)

Wilde was fond of Baudelaire’s writing. In 1874, Wilde was in Paris with Robert Sherard, in company of a coterie of “febrile, Baudelaire-obsessed young poets” gathering at *Le Chat Noir* to drink absinthe and discuss Baudelaire’s decadent work (Sturgis 280). “They adopted its distinctive taints of pessimism and nervous hypersensitivity, its stylistic complexity and its fascination with depravity” (Sturgis 280). Wilde was under the pervading influence of Baudelaire’s decadent verse, especially *‘Les Fleurs du Mal’* (1857). He writes of the effect of Baudelaire’s poetry:

let its subtle music steal into your brain and colour your thoughts, and you will become for a moment what he was who wrote it [...] and your soul will grow eager to know more, and will feed upon poisonous honey (qtd. in Killeen, ‘Oscar Wilde’ 50).

“Symphony in Yellow” is a poem very much *à la Baudelaire*, feeding upon that “poisonous honey”. The composite poem is highly monochromatic in hues. On the one hand, the colour palette is limited: the adjective “yellow” appears four times in the poem. On the other hand, its various shades are depicted gradually through an excess of enumeration, and ultimately mingle with green, both colours symbolizing decadence. The obsessive monochromatism is amplified by cacophonic sound-effects including discordant eye-rhymes (“hay”–“quay”) and near rhymes (“wharf”–“scarf”; “elms”–“Thames”). The images of the butterfly and the midge epitomize ephemeral beauty and fleeting lives in a machine age. The omnibus is like a butterfly, but at the same time “butterfly” rhymes with “passer-by”, indicating the insect-like, “diminished scale of human experience” within the metropolis (Smulders 295). In the final stanza, the buzzing sounds are eventually silenced, “coming to a standstill in a static image of the river Thames” (Doran 60). The Thames is described as “a rod of rippled jade” echoing the paired arrangement of Wilde’s *‘Impressions’*: *‘Le Jardin’* and *‘La Mer’* (1882). “The long rods of polished steel” in the engine room in *‘La Mer’* recall the lily’s “rod of dusty gold,” in *‘Le Jardin’*, hence the unity of composition in that arrangement. This image of the “phallic rod” as a celebration of mechanical power in the face of nature’s force thus becomes recurrent in Wilde’s impressions of beauty set in the machine age (Smulders 292).

The urban experience described in “Symphony in Yellow” is that of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1845) in that a sensation of anxiety, rootlessness and estrangement can be revealed in tracing the individual in the urban environment (de Vries 333). The city is in constant flux. Taking in the expanding city in full often becomes challenging for an idling *flâneur*. The dandy, however, embraces an omniscient, panoramic perspective of the flux of urban life. Although a vagabond, the cosmopolitan dandy makes himself at home all over the world. By intermedially fixing his synaesthetic metropolitan impressions, he acquires citizenship of the world.

To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world, such are some of the minor pleasures of those independent, intense and impartial spirits (Baudelaire 19).

The dandiacal gaze supposes an acute observer of the expanding metropolis and the marginal elements of Victorian society.

this solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, always roaming the great desert of men, has a nobler aim than that of the pure idler, a more general aim, other than the fleeting pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call 'modernity' (Baudelaire 22).

The decadent dandy perceives elements of modernity through the use of intermediality in his poetry. Wilde's poetic impressions exploiting the affordances of various media thus become a harbinger of modernity. Even if dandyism, as Baudelaire observes, "is a setting sun; like a declining star, [...] magnificent, without heat and full of melancholy", it is "the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages" (Baudelaire 46).

In conclusion, this paper has retraced how the figure of the wandering dandy-*flâneur* would become the "painter of modern life" in two of Wilde's impressionistic city lyrics of intermedial significance. It has been argued that Wilde makes use of intermedial translation to verbally express his visual and aural experiences in his impressionistic poetry. The paper has also dealt with Whistler's impact on Wilde's cityscapes. Wilde's multi-sensory pursuit of beauty in an industrial age, his questioning of generic boundaries in art, his preference for contemplation over action, prioritizing artifice over nature clearly demonstrate his profound intellectual engagement with Aestheticism. While his earlier *'Impression du Matin'* focuses on the beauty of modernity from an aesthetic perspective, the later decadent "Symphony in Yellow" is the metonymic evocation of the dandy as an elaborate artifact. The *flâneur's* exterior exploration in *'Impression du Matin'* gives way to the interior experience exemplified by the dandy's exotic connoisseurship, marking a shift in Wilde's impressionistic poetry from Aestheticism to Decadence. The dandy's voyeuristic gaze and the choreographics of looking have gained particular importance in Wilde's city lyrics. Within the spatiotemporal topography of Victorian London, the objects of the dandy's contemplation embrace the beauty of the city, along with the materiality of scientific advances, as well as contemporary society. The functions of intermediality are thus unified in the figure and perspective of the Wildean dandy. It has been demonstrated that, due to his erudition and synaesthetic sensibility, the dandy mingles the visual and the aural in his cityscapes. Transmedial phenomena and intersensoriality thus play a key role in Wilde's perception of modernity and his depiction of beauty in a scientific age.

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The Fall of Icarus (through mediums): Intersemiotic Translation from Painting to Poetry

SWAGATA CHAKRABORTY

Abstract: The paper will discuss Pieter Bruegel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and William Carlos Williams' poem 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' through the conceptual lens of intersemiotic translation to explore how the poem's rendition of the painting departs from the more traditional concerns of interlinguistic translation, i.e., the focus on optimum fidelity between the source and the translated text. With a focus on the visual-verbal (a)symmetries, the paper will try to look into how intersemiotic translation between pictorial and linguistic texts throws into quandary the hierarchical relationship between source text and translated text by culling out different but complementary meanings by means of their respective signifiatory codes to engineer an augmentation of meaning, rather than a faithful preservation of the same.

Keywords: Intersemiotic translation, Pieter Bruegel, William Carlos Williams, visual media, verbal media

Introduction

What is the relationship between two (forms of) artworks? According to Roland Barthes, every "text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). Similarly, Julia Kristeva has observed that "[a]ny text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). And since the semantic and formal threads weaving texts are various and varied, it is worth looking into the operative principles holding together the expansive filaments of textual networks. Intersemiotic translation is one such principle. Old texts often rouse new curiosities and therefore, the primary texts of this paper consist of *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* painted by Pieter Bruegel in 1555 and William Carlos Williams' poem "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus", published in 1962 in the collection *Pictures from Bruegel and other Poems*. The method shall include a comparative reading of the two texts to discuss the "possibilities and limitations inherent in the two sign systems" (Cluver and Watson 70) and understand to what end they have been harnessed by the painter and the poet respectively in keeping with the distinct time and cultural periods of their production vis-à-vis intersemiotic translation. Derrida argues that "the irreducible multiplicity of tongues" (165) always "exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing" (165) in the practice of translation. Stretching this concept further, it could be argued that the multiplicity offered by the grammar of signification of different extra-linguistic media systems not only challenges the concept of a 'word for word' translational representation of the source text but also makes it possible to add alternate layers to it. Known mostly for his vast landscape paintings, Bruegel's text, produced during the Flemish Renaissance, could be read as a representation of the macroscopic commune where "man's position in nature seems inconsequential" (Lewis 406). The paper will investigate into whether Williams' Modernist poem, albeit bearing the same title as the painting, written in a world reeling from the two World Wars, re-semiotises the panoramic concerns of the visual text by giving it a more psychologically individuated emphasis, revising the mythic connotations of the figure and fall of Icarus.

Taking a cue from Lawrence Venuti's observation that "Modernism asserts the 'independence' of the translated text, demanding that it be judged on its 'own' terms... accepting the 'responsibility' of distinguishing itself" (189), there will be a discussion on how the poem distinguishes itself from the painting to explore the incompleteness in translation. The research paper will, thus, look into the means of convertibility from visual to verbal mediums in light of the idea that "the transfer can never be total" (Benjamin 18), to determine the "informational lacunae" (Gorlee 240) between the texts and determine what they signify about the exigencies of their respective times. The focus will be along two axes of representational aspects of the figure of Icarus across mediums – social and psychological. Rather than reading the deviances as a failure in translation, the paper will try to explore how through the verbal codes (syntactical, typographical, etc.), the poem differs, and by extension, adds nuance to the visual codes (colour, perspective, etc.) of the painting.

Literature Review

The relation between Bruegel's poem and Williams' painting has been widely discussed but, more often than not, has been filtered through the lens of description or *ekphrasis* perhaps owing to the fact that they are titled the same. Critics have broadly ideated the relationship between the two texts in terms of their literality. For instance, Charlotte Kent argues in her essay "Ways of Seeing Williams' 'Pictures from Bruegel'" that Williams' poem "confirms his allegiance to Bruegel's version of the story" (71). Also, Joel Conarroe observes in "The Measured Dance: Williams' 'Pictures from Bruegel'" that the poem follows the painting "exactly" (571). Irene R. Fairley too points out in her essay "On Reading Poems: Visual & Verbal Icons In William Carlos Williams' Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus", that "there seems to be an isomorphism between the poem's visual and verbal icons, as well as structural correspondence to the Bruegel painting" (67). However, departing from such a stance, the paper will probe into the (im)possibilities of coherence between the two semiotic fields namely pictorial and linguistic to explore how intersemiotic translation, rather than maintaining a literality between texts, opens up greater possibilities of excavating meanings by making use of the semiotic codes associated with different media systems.

The etymology of the word 'translation' originates from the Latin word *translatio* which indicates "carrying across" (Campbell and Vidal 7) of meaning or to convey a message. However, since its inception, Translation Studies has focused on linguistic concerns as the means of conveyance, and a faithful representation of the "original", as the end of conveyance – a condition that Dinda Gorlee terms as 'linguistic imperialism' (1994, 34). For example, Eugene Nida posits 'equivalence' as the operative tenet of translation. He argues that formal equivalence is concerned with the transfer of the message itself and dynamic equivalence aims at invoking the same emotion via the target language as was triggered by the source language (129). Echoing such a preoccupation with 'sameness', J.C. Catford defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (20). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in his seminal work "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", although Roman Jakobson lists three types of translation namely intralingual translation, interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation, it is interlingual translation or the "interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (Jakobson 127) that he terms as "translation proper" (Jakobson 127). Although with the rapid digitisation of the world, multimodality or the presence of non-linguistic texts have found greater accessibility, Linguist Yves Gambier argues that "[t]here is a strong paradox: we are ready to acknowledge the interrelations between the verbal and the visual, between language and nonverbal, but the dominant research perspective remains largely linguistic" (2006, 97). One of the reasons for the sustained emphasis on operating within verbal semiotics could be the anticipation of a non-compliance of semiotic codes between media systems (in this case, painting and poetry), which poses a risk of the severance of a text from its "natural" environment, leading to a possibility of "distortion". This leads to a fear of "constrained translation", a concept that indicates an anticipated fear of

loss of creative freedom on part of the translator because it is almost pre-supposed that when a text is translated to a medium governed with alternate semiotic codes, the original text would not be able to fulfil its intended purpose because the semiotic codes of the medium in translation “would impose their own laws and conditions on the text” (Mayoral et al 365). Therefore, manifestations of texts across different modes have been sparsely accounted for which has given the practice of translation *per se* the connotation of a monomodal operation: whereby interactions among different sign systems have been removed from the ambit of the practice *proper* and understood as adaptation (Loffredo 44). Taking a detour from such a conservationist conception of translation, Theo Hermans, in his essay “What is (not) Translation?”, has argued against a fixed definition of translation suggesting that “translation is a complex thing and that a comprehensive and clear-cut view of it is hard to obtain” (75), undercutting the possibility of an ‘invariant signified’ (79) being transferred from one text to another. In line with his argument, Klaus Kaindl observes in “Multimodality and Translation”, that since “non verbal texts like music and paintings do not have precise semantics and generate meanings through association and connotation” (265), there is always a challenge of pinning down the “invariant signified” in the first place. Thus, Dinda Gorlee introduces the term “semiotranslation” which she defines as:

[A] growing network which should not be pictured as a single line emanating from a source text toward a designated target text. Rather, we must conceive of any number of such translational lines radiating in all directions from a starting text to end states of variable value... By steadily integrating new pieces of information on the object, the translations make the real meaning of the original ever more complete, detailed and continuous. Yet there will always remain informational lacunae. By this token, a translation is never finished and can always, however minimally, be improved upon (2003, 240).

Taking this observation as a point of departure, the paper will discuss if intersemiotic translation could go beyond the concerns of preservation of meaning to a critical compounding of meaning to better suit the interpretive demands of the target readership, thus revising the concept of equivalence in favour of supplementation. In this regard, Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Task of The Translator” discusses the concept of the afterlife of a text where, in the process of translation, the original text undergoes a “maturing process” (17) whereby there is a “de ontologisation” of the source text (Kaindl 259) or rather, a breakdown of the hierarchy between the original and the translated texts. As a result, Peeter Torop sums up that, “the same text may exist simultaneously in different sign systems” (273). Therefore, Gambier notes that intersemiotic translation departs from classical translation theories which look for an “automated correspondence” (2016, 888) between texts to a more “purposeful action” (2016, 890), and emerges as a two-way process where the new translation always also affects the source text (Campbell and Vidal 7). And through this research paper, there will be an attempt to look into how Williams’ poem translates Bruegel’s painting by employing alternate semiotic codes, and forges newer associations among the pictorial textual strands of the source text to incarnate one of its afterlives.

Discussion on non-literary correspondence between the two texts

In Bruegel’s painting, the visual lexicon underpins two kinds of movement – the agentic productive motion of the agrarian workers as they plough, herd flocks of sheep and catch fish and the uncontrolled spiralling downward motion of Icarus breaking the surface of the water. It is the former movement that is located in the foreground with the workers pointedly unaware of the titular character drowning in the background – the ploughman is turned leftward, the shepherd looks up and the fisherman looks down at the sea. The fecund activities in motion counter the moribund movement of Icarus as the ploughman literally ploughs away with his back towards him. The shepherd too drives his flock away from Icarus. The two ships with a distance between them suggesting the possibility of a locomotive trajectory could also be said to oppose the movement of Icarus –

a controlled navigational motion that is a foil to the plummeting trajectory of Icarus. Thus, the visual depiction of the myth positions the death of Icarus as a play of perspective rather than a grand tragedy, metonymically diminished by an array of agrarian production against which the flailing legs of the mythical figure lends little consequence. The celebrated hero is but mired in an “intentional quasi-obscurity” (Lindsay and Huppe 377).



Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (Bruegel 1555)

This could be read in two ways – one, the overarching *apathia* in a world where quotidian concerns and lives nonchalantly go on, oblivious to the grandiose disaster where “[a]ll life is turned away from the tragedy” (Fairley 4). Alternately, it could be seen as an example of social realism where there is an enquiry into the politics and possibilities of performatively dealing with death and disaster in a life of privation and poverty, for the characters on the foreground belong to the working class.¹ This strategy goes against the Renaissance convention of focussing on classical heroic figures. Margaret A. Sullivan observes that there is no “classicizing interest” (129) in Bruegel’s work.

In 1558 it was not unusual for an artist to satirize the peasant or flatter the aristocracy, but the activities of ordinary people received only peripheral attention. Scenes of daily life were relegated to a subordinate position in the margin of a manuscript or inserted as an amusing detail within a traditional subject (128).

By offsetting the fall of Icarus with banalities far removed from lofty mythical narratives, the painting could be read as countercultural insofar as it demystifies the myth, revealing the economic infrastructural conditions that tales of *audacia* and *hubris* often elide over in their parable-like concerns. There is a juxtaposition of the material and the metaphysical – the toiling proletariat firmly rooted in the earthly realm sets off the mythic figure of Icarus as fustian; fissured from the quotidian exigencies. The grand endeavour of the mythic hero becomes the “amusing detail” in the painting. Bruegel’s concern remains with material conditions of the Everyman that (dis)qualify the possibility of indulging in grand narratives about heroic tragedies. In the represented social rung of the community, *audacia* resides instead in the ability of survival, as is exemplified in the blood red garment of the ploughman looming large in the foreground.

On the other hand, the verbal translation of the painting could be said to take a detour from social realism to focus on a more individuated psychological response to tragedy. While Irene Fairley argues that the poem “[t]hrough linguistic and typographical devices, strives for equivalence to the affects rendered by Bruegel in paint on canvas” (72), the paper will discuss how rather than striving for equivalence, Williams alters the focus of affective emphasis on Icarus by looking at formal

variations of the text. In Williams' own words in *The Wedge*, "[t]here is no poetry of distinction without formal invention, for it is in the intimate form that works of art achieve their exact meaning" (1988, 55).

The poem begins with a language of reportage – "According to Bruegel" (Williams 1962, 4), and then goes on to most radically depart from the journalistic style of writing by employing a fractured syntactical order.

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

(Williams 1962, 4)

The lack of punctuation marks, coupled with abrupt enjambments, creates a sense of disarray, almost mimicking the Modernist form of Stream of Consciousness. The undifferentiated trajectory could be said to reflect the vagaries and vacillations that inform the free association of thoughts which constellate the human psychoscape. The question that arises is whose psychological reaction is the poet tracing? One possible inference could be that while Bruegel, through the depiction of ongoing controlled and productive movement focuses on the macroscopic (non)impact of the fall, Williams offers an alternate microscopic perspective, capturing the haphazard motion of the temporal experience of Icarus himself during mid-fall as the poem charts the path which "descends from "when Icarus fell" to "Icarus drowning"" (Cluver 75).

Furthermore, vis-à-vis the typographical arrangement, the lines of the poem almost whoosh through, where individual lines do not begin with capital letters and are weaved without any break. It is literally one sentence breaking apart, and by extension, *falling*. Therefore, the typography reads not only as a reflection of the inchoateness of Icarus's thoughts as he falls, but also as the depiction of the fall itself, as exemplified in the columnar arrangement of the poem with short line running for seven stanzas. Therefore, harnessing the grammar of signification of the new medium, Williams appears to show the moments prior to the point where the painting begins, i.e., the moment at which Icarus breaks the surface of the water.

With regard to the idea of tracing the experience of the fall, the use of the figurative device of sibilance becomes significant in the fifth stanza of the poem. Speaking of sound symbolism, Marie Borroff observes that "An important mimetic role is played...by the kind of consonance sometimes

called sibilance, or hissing, whose three most important phonic elements are /s/, /z/, and /sh/ ... The word hissing, sound-symbolic in shape and in origin, calls up metaphorically the image of a menacing snake" (138). While depicting a pivotal incident of the myth, Williams writes "Sweating in the sun/that melted/the wings' wax" (1962, 4). The connotation of the 'ss' sound, redolent of hissing, could also be read as symbolising the rustling movement of the wind as an object cuts through it. The sibilant sound pattern produces an effect of synaesthesia wherein visual cues give way to aural stimulation so that the reader almost hears Icarus fall through the wind as they read the text. It could also be the sound of air rustling that Icarus *himself* hears as he plunges downwards. In the last stanza, Williams harks back to the sibilant pattern as Icarus falls with – a "splash quite unnoticed" (1962, 4). Here, both Icarus and the reader aurally register the death knell – the sound of the horrific "splash" as he breaks through the surface of the water. As sibilance is associated with Satan because of his serpentine disguise, the word "splash" augments and intensifies the hellish horror experienced by Icarus. Hence, the acoustic possibilities of the verbal medium facilitated by phonetic configurations add a different interpretive layer to the silent pictorial landscape through the process of intersemiotic translation. While Williams does *cite* Bruegel, he reconfigures the dynamics of *sight*. Icarus is presented in a magnified manner in contrast to the painting where around the drowning figure of Icarus, the greenish hue of water grows dim, reflecting an engulfment of his persona into obsolescence with his head submerged under water – neither seeing nor seen.

Additionally, in keeping with the idea of social realism, Bruegel clearly delineates the details of the characters on the foreground by portraying their respective vocational accoutrements which give them all an individual identity. The ploughman, the shepherd, and the fisherman are distinguished from each other. Williams, on the other hand, reverses the perspective as he relegates these figures into the background by collectively referring to them as "pageantry" (1962, 4), barring the token reference to the farmer. In fact, in the second line of the poem, he brings in the clause – "When Icarus fell" (1962, 4), bringing Icarus into focus at the very outset to make the event of his fall the framing narrative which qualifies all other strands. Icarus is no longer mired in "quasi – obscenity".

Produced almost more than four centuries apart on opposite sides of the Atlantic, the (a)symmetries of the texts are also informed by the distinct cultural milieu of the times of their production. The 16th century visual text, at the peak of Renaissance Humanism, and on the cusp of anthropocentric Enlightenment, offers a semblance of assuredness – of life progressing in spite of death in its midst². The flock of sheep ambling away in the direction opposite to Icarus could be read in terms of Biblical connotations – the Lamb of God frolicking in the verdure signifying a sacred regeneration.

In the verbal text, while on the thematic level, Icarus overtly appears as an oblique entity, the imagist terseness of the verse adds to the pathos for it almost reads like one of many obituaries of the mass casualties of the Wars. In a world reeling from the atomic fracas of the two wars, the mythical figure is transformed into an Everyman, rather than a fustian anomaly in the bucolic setting in the painting. Here, he is caught between the paradox of the inevitability of scientific progress (as is symbolised in the wax wings) and the ineluctable cost that accompanies it. With reference to the last words of the second and third lines of the poems i.e. "fell" and "spring" respectively, Mary Ann Caws detects a pun on the word "spring" and observes that there is "a contrary convergence between the motions of falling down and springing up" (326) which underscores the wartime connotation of Icarus' endeavour. Almost in anticipation of the plight and flight of Icarus, in the poem "Catastrophic Birth", written during WWII, Williams had evoked, "[e]ach age brings new calls upon violence/ for new rewards..." (1988, 56), emphasising the imbricated nature of advancement and disaster. Thus, Icarus could be seen as a 20th century topical human embodiment of this paradox.

Unlike the painting, the poem finds no proverbial closure as it ends with the line "Icarus drowning" (Williams 1962, 4). The verb in its present continuous tense intensifies the incessant sense of the trauma of falling. The lack of a period at the end anticipates an interminable duration of the trauma which is almost elegiac. In his reading of 20th century elegies, Jahan Ramazani observes that while in

traditional elegies “the poet redresses loss and overcomes grief...the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss” (xi). He terms this as “anti-elegiac”. Therefore, the implied interminable traumatic drowning of Icarus could suggest an anti-elegiac ode to Icarus, making him the centre of the text unlike Bruegel’s painting.

Conclusion

Clive Scott understands translations not as a means to “solve” the source text but to optimally grasp the dynamics of the reader’s encounter and interactions with it which requires the translator to see the source text in all its insolvability and indeterminate glory (88). He argues, “[w]hat is at stake is not meaning, but the play of sense, the interactivity of senses” (89). It is precisely the sensory multiplicities afforded by the two semiotic systems that rebut the notion of untranslatability to rather see it as a scope for expanded expressivity. Various translations are often in conversation with each other albeit unbeknownst to the artists who create them. In the Bruegel/Williams intersemiotic translation, there is a negation of a singular authorial centrality because it is precisely in a shared reading of the two texts that there emerges a tension between the “social” and the “personal”. To use a cinematographic analogy, Williams’ poem appears in continuation to Bruegel’s painting – a high angle shot that cuts to a close-up, in an intersemiotic montage of the myth across time and space. Visually, the Alpine scenery of the painting, with its dominant greenish hue and an abundance of life, obfuscates a singular death by relativising it against the continuation of the species; verbally, the poem disavows the anonymous nature of personal suffering by telescoping into the peculiarities of the fall³, going beyond the concerns of literal equivalence. And as intersemiotic translation cannot be conceptualised as a linear, teleological and finite practice connecting the source and the translated text through a literal conduit, the poem’s re-semiotisation of the painting remains open to yet more afterlives.

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Notes

¹ According to Jacob Wisse, “Bruegel’s paintings focus on the lives of Flemish commoners, which earned him the nickname “peasant Bruegel” (Wisse 2002).

² Piotr Kolodziej observes that the Netherlandish folk proverb “No plough stops because a man dies” was “well-known in Bruegel’s times” (Kolodziej 2016, 68) which further obliterates the import of Icarus’ death.

³ In his Introduction to *The Wedge*, Williams had pointed out, “But through art the psychologically maimed may become the most distinguished man of his age” (Williams 1944, 53).

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Modernist Verbal and Visual Portraiture: The Artistic Construction of the Portrait's Subject

NATALIA MORZHENKOVA

Abstract: In the twentieth century the appearance of a great number of innovative verbal and visual portraits, created by modernist writers and painters, haunted by questions of identity and human representability, was determined by the tangible shift in sociocultural ideas about selfhood and the manners of its construction. Analyzing the poetics of literary and pictorial portraits created by Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne, this paper focuses on the intermedial flexibility of this genre and investigates the strategies of destruction and deformation of traditional referential portrait conventions through the juxtaposition of mimetic and non-mimetic elements, the “still life” approach to portraiture, intertextual scaffolding, activation of genre memory, and the parodization of the concept of resemblance. It demonstrates that the indexical tracing of the individual's particular identity as a traditional function of portraiture is replaced in modernist portraiture by the fluid process of identity construction and erosion.

Keywords: modernist portraiture, literary portrait, non-mimetic representation, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound

The term “literary portrait” is very thought-provoking, as it refers directly to the question of the relationships between the arts and the dialectic between word and image. It encourages us to think broadly, searching for links between different art forms and revealing the counterpoints that they create for each other. What do we mean when we use the word “portrait” to define literary texts? Is it just a metaphor, which arose due to an inclination to establish similarities and substitute one thing for another? Is it a manifestation of the idea of a synthesis of the arts (akin to Horace's “ut pictura poesis,” Simonides of Ceos’ “painting is mute poetry, poetry a speaking painting,” or Philip Sidney's poetry as a speaking picture) that goes back to the archaic period?

In the context of this article, the notion of a portrait is used in relation to genre as a cross-media process rather than a fixed, distinctive entity. A broad understanding of genre invites us to look at the literary portrait through the lens of the philosophy of portraiture in which the notion of personality is constantly transformed and rethought. Every cultural and historical era puts forward its portrait and its understanding of a person, which is revised generationally. However, genre transformations do not mean that the previous generic forms are completely rejected as useless ballast. A genre always implicitly preserves in its memory the past. The novelty of innovative forms can be appreciated and perceived only by comparing them with the old ones.

The conventions and codes of both a pictorial and a literary portrait depend simultaneously on the genre memory and the general artistic principles of the aesthetic-historical paradigm within which a portrait is created. For example, Gertrude Stein directly connects the technique of portraiture, that is, how portraits are “made,” with the zeitgeist: “The thing that is important is the way that portraits of men and women and children are written, by written I mean made. And by made I mean felt. Portraits of men and women and children are differently felt in every generation and by generation

one means a period of time" (Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," 99). It is notable that Stein's portrait vision developed in close dialogue with the modernist pictorial practice of portraiture. Such intense interaction of the literary modernist portrait with its visual counterparts is characteristic of the period. It is no coincidence that she uses the verb "make," blurring the distinction between the production of visual and verbal portraits. Indeed, in the modernist portrait, emerging between verballity and visuality, the interdependence of the image and the word (what Michel Foucault defined as seeable and sayable in his essay on René Magritte's painting entitled *This is Not a Pipe*) is clearly visible.

I. Against Representation: A Challenge of Modernist Portraiture

Haunted by the question of human representability, modernist artists deeply explored the cultural and historical conditionality of the portrait, revealing its dynamic essence based on the complex interaction between the artist, portrayed subject, and the audience. The pursuit of physical resemblance and visual verisimilitude traditionally associated with the portrait is replaced by the idea of a model as an artificial construct of the artist's imagination, which implies both a creator and a viewer. Challenging the traditional portrait's referential purposes and interrogating its indexical connection with a particular subject beyond the picture, modernist portraiture made this process of construction almost tangible.

It seems that the portrait's unrecognition (partial or, in some cases, absolute) was much more in line with the modernist concept of an individual, whose identity is unstable and impossible to grasp. This new anti-realist approach to portraiture is evident, for example, in Jean Cocteau's series of pencil sketches "Self-Portrait without a Face" (1910-1913), in which we see only head and shoulder outlines of the artist, while his face is blank.¹ The title itself sounds like a contradiction in terms. The absence of a face — a key component of a traditional portrait — turns this image into an anti-portrait, challenging our key genre expectations. At the same time, the outline of the drawing still makes it possible to identify the depicted figure as Cocteau.

It should be mentioned that an image of a faceless man interrogating the traditional reliability of human face recognition and symbolizing the modern human condition becomes a crucial figure of the modernist anthropological vision. Cocteau's self-portrait provides an illustrative case of the metonymic fragmentation of a portrayed subject who loses his undivided totality and coherent identity. In this sense, Cocteau's faceless self-portrait is a graphic echo of Guillaume Apollinaire's pantomime, "What time does a train leave for Paris?" ("A quelle heure un train partira-t-il pour Paris?", 1914), featuring a faceless flute player, moving across Paris.² Entirely, or almost, faceless models can be found in a great number of modernist portraits: for example, Vanessa Bell's faceless portrait of Virginia Woolf, as well as the faceless portraits by Casimir Malevich and Giorgio di Chirico.

A similar trend is observed in modernist literature. Analyzing literary representation of a face as a text, Holger A. Pausch underlines a crucial transformation of the status of human face in the literary portrait at the beginning of the twentieth century. Being fragmented, reconstructed, and distorted, a human face was no longer considered as a readable image, representing the vital traits of a character; it turned into "an autonomous, non-representational, and self-referential linguistic image" (Pausch 350-351). As an example of this transformation, Pausch explores fragmentation and reconstruction as the key narrative procedures employed by Proust in *In Search of Lost Time* to create a verbal image of Albertine's face (355). Analyzing a great number of modern literary portraits, he comes to the conclusion that a few minimal markers are enough to depict a modern face, because "in the narrative space of Modernity ... the portrayal of the face is not essential any more" (358). Let it be borne in mind that a dramatic change in modernist portraiture is inextricably linked with the emergence of the concept of the face as an experimental surface. For example, in her tellingly titled advertising pamphlet *Auto-Facial Construction* Mina Loy describes a human face as a sculptural configuration that can be created through a process of self-fashioning and reconstruction.

It is typical of modernist portraiture to replace full-face depiction with various fragments and details. Describing modernist literary anti-portraits, Kamila Pawlikowska underlines that they often “escape materialism of the flesh and focus on the inner qualities” (83). Modernist emphasis on individual interiority manifests in a move away from external objective realism and a tendency to depict characters as unfinished and fragmented. This representational shift determines the reduction of the outside perspective and the turn to an inside one in modernist portraiture, which tries to accent the interior invisible essence of an individual rather than capture a physical likeness. The destruction and deformation of the referential portrait image became perceived as a more satisfactory way to reflect artistically the authenticity of persons in their proteanism and diversity. The modernist rejection of considering portraiture in terms of realism and verisimilitude was also facilitated by the fact that the non-artistic documenting functions of the portrait were taken over by photography.³

We find a similar principle of portraiture in the avant-garde literary portraits of Stein, who was often criticized for accumulating irrelevant details while leaving the subject of her writings blank. Analyzing Stein’s portraits, Ulla Haselstein notes that in her portraits created before 1912, there is not even visual imagery, although they were created under the influence of the post-impressionist visuality of Matisse, Picasso, and Cézanne (730). Her literary experiment with the portrait genre was encouraged by Picasso’s attempt to refocus the portrait from representing the model by virtue of a resemblance between the image and sitter onto the artist’s freedom to construct and interpret the portrayed subject. Regarding this devaluation of verisimilitude in Picasso’s portraits, it is important to remember that during the twentieth century, portraiture shifted its focus away from the subject’s identity toward the artist’s perception and conceptualization.

The total dematerialization of the portrayed subjects and the extreme foregrounding of her experimental style are evident in Stein’s portraits “Matisse” (1910–1911) and “Picasso” (1910–1911), which were created out of a sense of competition and solidarity that arose between the artists and the writer. The proper names given in the titles of these literary portraits contrast with the emphasized abstractness, achieved through the repetition of long chains of rhythmically connected, but semantically reduced phrases such as “certainly some said this of him” (Stein, “Matisse” 37–38):

One was quite certain that for a long part of his being one being living he had been trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and then when he could not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing, when he had completely convinced himself that he would not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing he was really certain then that he was a great one and he certainly was a great one. Certainly every one could be certain of this thing that this one is a great one. (37)

We observe here an interesting onomastic tension: while the proper names refer to the singular clearly defined subjects, the text itself annuls their images. The artists’ names in these portraits are constantly replaced by the pronoun “one” with its referential duality (“one” refers to a certain individual, and at the same time is very general). This deliberate whirling repetition of the pronoun creates a distancing effect, removing the text both from the proper names, stated in the titles, and from Matisse and Picasso as artists with individualized modes of existence.

Various kinds of dissonances and contrasts, revealing a tense dialogue between the author and the model, mark modernist portraits with their new attitude to the representational goal. In this context, let us look Henri Matisse’s portrait “Woman in a Hat” (1905), which became a scandalous sensation at the Salon d’Automne of 1905 from where it was acquired by Leo and Gertrude Stein. The variegated and disordered chaos of color spots, at first glance, is rather unrelated to the silhouette of the model; there is a complex tension between a realistic outline and unnatural imaginative color. This non-mimetic color construction forms a kind of altered portrait, which is in a complex, fascinating plastic relationship with the heroine, and in general with the traditional mimetic, realistic portrait. It is noteworthy that a modernist portrait encourages not only new relations between the artist and the subject but also intense dialogue with the previous genre canon.

II. Juxtaposition of Different Modes of Representation

The combination of various modes of representation is characteristic of modernist language in general and the modernist verbal and visual portrait in particular. This juxtaposition of realistic and imaginative elements, for example, can be seen in portraits by the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, who set quite realistic heads and figures on emphatically decorative backgrounds. The similar overlapping possibilities of realistic (or let us say “reality congruent”) and imaginative modes we can find also in Virginia Woolf’s “Waiting for Déjeuner,” included in a series of eight sketches called “Portraits” (236–237). The portrayed subjects are Monsieur and Madame Louvois who are having their lunch in an urban café. The very choice of the place itself refers to Impressionist aesthetics. In a wide range of Impressionist paintings, the atmosphere of immediacy and directly observable everyday urban life is conveyed through the topos of a café, functioning as a cultural and social institution of the bourgeois city environment.

Constructed by analogy with the syntactic pattern of the adverbial clause of time introduced by the subordinate conjunction “when,” Woolf’s portrait consists of two groups of parallel episodes:

When the humming birds quivered in the flower’s trumpet; when the vast slab-footed elephants squelched through the mud; when the animal-eyed savage pushed off from the reeds in his canoe, when the Persian woman picked a louse from the hair of the child; (...).

When the waiter in his creased shirt, shiny coat, apron tied in the middle and sleeked back hair spat on his hands when wiped the plate to save the trouble of rinsing it; when the sparrows in the road collected over a spot of dung; when the iron gates of the level crossing swung to; (...) when the lights flickered over the Cinema announcing the new Jungle Film; (...) when the grey-blue clouds of the northern hemisphere let a grey-blue patch shine for a moment on the waters of the Seine: — Monsieur and Madame Louvois stared at the mustard pot and the cruet; at the yellow crack on the marble topped table. (236).

The first group of “when” episodes are rhythmic, and poetically marked descriptions of an exotic landscape and a Parisian street, correlated simultaneously with the narrator’s imagination and direct observation. The act of imagining flows into the act of perceiving: imaginary slab-footed elephants, animal-eyed savages, and the Persian woman are replaced by observable realities of the cityscape (a waiter wearing a shiny coat and apron, sparrows, lorry with iron rails, etc.). The mention of a new jungle film in the Paris episode semantically links it to the exoticism of the previous description. Interestingly, the same rhythmic-syntactic pattern of the “oriental” and Parisian episodes establishes an equivalence between them. For the artist’s eye, fantastic images of the East, and details of everyday life lying before the eyes have the same aesthetic value.

In the structure of the portrait, two episodes, built as accumulating image streams, formally function as subordinate clauses with the repetitive conjunction “when.” However, their formal subordinate function, which consists in introducing the chronotopic setting, contrasts with their poeticness and abundance. The emphatic beauty and aesthetic elaboration of the “background” underline the prosaicness of the portrait’s main subjects, who are paralyzed in their dull immunity to the picturesqueness of this life (“Monsieur and Madame Louvois neither saw nor heard,” “Monsieur and Madame Louvois stared at the mustard pot and the cruet; at the yellow crack on the marble topped table”) (“Portraits” 236). Against the background of this exuberant imagery, the “main” fragments from a syntactic point of view, associated with the images of the portrayed Madame and Monsieur Louvois, look emphatically prosaic and “empty.” Life seems to dry up when the focus shifts to the dining couple. The background is much more interesting than the “key” subjects of this portrait, who turn from unreceptive automaton characters into animal-like figures (“the eyes on Madame and Monsieur Louvois lit with lustre; for down on the marble topped table in front of them the sleek haired waiter slapped a plate of tripe”) (“Portraits” 236). These automaton and animal metaphors can be regarded as figures of lack correlating to the “dehumanization” of the portrait in modernist

aesthetics and challenging our expectations to recognize the portrayed subject as an objectively represented individual.⁴

In Woolf's portrait, the connection between the portrayed characters and the author is externally established through the wordplay. The surname of the heroes of the portrait (Louvois) contains, like the surname of the writer herself, a "wolf" component (cf. French Louvois – louve, she-wolf; English homonym Woolf-wolf). Maggie Humm sees in this similarity of surnames an explicit invitation to read this text as "a performative self-portrait of mocking self deflection" (Humm, "Portraits" 98). This observation is relevant here because it underlines the modernist artist's evident presence in the portrait in the role of the constructor of her sitter.

However, I would like to point out another interpretative possibility of these surnames' echoing. If the characters' "wolf" component is associated with their bestial gluttony, on the one hand, unexpected in the bourgeois civilized and urban environment, but on the other hand, anticipated by the exotic natural imagery of the first paragraph, the author's wolfness seems to have a certain Hellenistic mythological allusiveness. "Wolf" is one of the epithets of Apollo, the god of art and artistic inspiration (Apollo of Lyceum, from *lyceios* – "wolfish"). It is notable that being deeply fascinated with Greece, Woolf frequently uses a Hellenistic intertext in her writings. In this portrait, the wolfness seems to have two contrasting dimensions – animal and cultural. Thus, the married couple is portrayed through the second "portrait" – the "portrait" of the artist, who is a point of convergence, where the acts of observation and imagination combine and overlap. In the process of portraiture, a "raw" non-artistic human is transformed into an artistically reflected subject that is dehumanized due to stepping away from conventional verisimilitude into expressive distortion and deformation.

One of the efficient techniques of the modernist subject's dehumanization is blurring the boundary between portrait and still life. In modernist portraits, we can often find additional genre schemes of still life or landscape. For example, Cézanne's portraits, traditionally defined as anti-psychological and similar in many ways with his still lifes (Tobin 8). Cézanne's special "still life" approach to portraiture manifested even in the particular requirements that the artist put forward for his models. He demanded complete immobility from sitters during many hours of sessions.

The trend towards genre contamination of a portrait with a still life can also be found in a literary modernist portrait. For example, Stein calls her literary Cubist still-life prose poems from the collection of verbal "portraits" in *Tender Buttons* (1914). From Stein's perspective, the genre of a portrait is determined not by what or who is depicted, but by the method of depiction. Speaking about the significance of this genre for her works in her lecture "Portraits and Repetition," she writes about "portraits of anything," no matter a person or an object (100). First of all, a portrait for her is a plane, a surface, providing "simple" looking and the experience of things in their immediate existence.

In Stein's writings, we can see a certain parallel between the portrait surface and the image of America as a wide surface without historical depth. In "Portraits and Repetitions," she writes about this ability of contemporary Americans to think about the world without any connection with established contexts:

In short this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against something else to be known, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation what it is and that is why it is American... (105)

A "flat" perception of the world is possible where there is no sense of the depth of history, where everything exists and coexists on one surface. For Stein, overcoming memory (including historical memory), connected with the sense of time, is the task of overcoming narrative linearity. Her portraiture destroys linear connections and eliminates the process of remembering that is incompatible with true "pure" existence: "In other words the making of a portrait of any one is as they are existing and as they are existing has nothing to do with remembering any one or anything" ("Portraits" 105). Stein emphasizes that in the process of portraiture, the subject is "carried out" from the

illusory linear narrativity and placed on the surface of “pure” immediate being. Portraiture for the writer means moving away from realistic mimetic vision, removing the illusion of similarity to life, trying to convey the universal schemes of “pure” being, which treats human life not as a linear development, but a being in the “eternal present.” According to Stein’s understanding of portraiture, the immanent features of a portrait are its universality and superindividuality.

Portraying human subjects or non-human objects, Stein treats them in a similar way, negating the distinction between a portrait and a still life. Rejecting the dialectic separation between an object and a person and depicting the animate and the inanimate as ontologically equal are typical of Cubist painting, challenging the difference between a portrait and a still life.

In analyzing the modernist still life approach to portraiture, let us turn to Ezra Pound’s “Portrait d’une femme” (1912):

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
 London has swept about you this score years
 And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
 Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
 Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.
 Great minds have sought you — lacking someone else.
 You have been second always. Tragical?
 No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
 One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
 One average mind — with one thought less, each year.
 Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit
 Hours, where something might have floated up.
 And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay (57).

Metaphorically calling the heroine of the poem Sargasso Sea in the first line, the author introduces the image of a motionless “mortifying” surface, correlated with the portrait’s surface. The heroine’s passivity defines her image, turning her into an ideal model for a portrait painter (“Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit / Hours, where something might have floated up”) (57). Interestingly, this ability of the patient heroine to “sit” for many hours (the verb “to sit” has the meaning “to pose for a painter”) unexpectedly echoes the above-mentioned requirements of Cézanne for his models. Pound constructs the portrait of his aging model through a chain of images of strange old things (oddments of all things; dimmed wares of price; the tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work; idols and ambergris and rare inlays; your riches; your great store; deciduous things; strange woods half sodden), which, like the wreckage of ships, have been accumulating around her. In this technique of “dismembering” the portrayed person into disconnected elements, we can recognize the general orientation of modernist portraiture towards the fragmentation of the model, turning it into “nature morte.” This irrevocable fusion of the subject with the environment is clearly emphasized in the final lines of the poem, which simultaneously affirm (“Yet this is you”) and cancel the very possibility of the subject’s portrait representation:

Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:
 In the slow float of differing light and deep,
 No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,
 Nothing that’s quite your own.
 Yet this is you (58).

A similar continuity of space between the portrayed model and the background can be observed in the poem “Portrait in Greys” (1917) by William Carlos Williams. This literary portrait depicts the poet’s wife, Florence, as inseparable from a grey landscape that represents the absolute confluence of interior and exterior spaces:

Will it never be possible
to separate you from your greyness?
Must you be always sinking backward
into your grey-brown landscapes—and trees
always in the distance, always against/a grey sky? (99).

The grey landscape is both the internal “space” of the person being portrayed and the external portrait surface, referring to the chameleon-like modernist subjectivity that is involved in an endless process of transformation.

The trend to blur the border between portrait, still life, and landscape manifests in “Portrait 3” from the above-mentioned series of portraits by Virginia Woolf (“Portraits” 238). The model of this portrait is a French, solid-looking peasant woman. Here the writer rather gives a “reflection of a reflection,” an “image of an image,” building her verbal portrait as a description of a potentially existing pictorial portrait, created in postimpressionist style. Woolf’s model is emphatically simplified. Her brightly lit face without shadows is “painted” with warm vivid primary colors red and yellow:

She was sitting in the sun. She had no hat. The light fixed her. There was no shadow. Her face was yellow and red; round too; a fruit on a body; another apple, only not on a plate. Breasts had formed apple-hard under the blouse on her body (238).

This description activates our mental vision and recalls the extreme simplicity of Van Gogh’s color scheme, which he got by reducing the usual palette to primary colors. Then the woman’s silhouette begins to transform into natural objects around her. Behind the round outlines of her face and chest, the author, looking at the model, sees the roundness of an apple, the shape of her eyes corresponds to leaves, and the roughness of the whole image is compared to the tree bark.

It is noteworthy that the effect of the traditional selfhood’s dissolution in Cézanne’s and Van Gogh’s portraits is achieved, among other techniques of their visual languages, by eliminating the distinction between foreground and background. Activating background, they dehumanize their models, establishing an ontological equivalence of human and non-human components of the environment. The similar principle of a portrait merging with the landscape elements is found also in Woolf’s portrait “The Frenchwoman in the Train,” in which Maggie Humm sees an echo of Van Gogh’s portraits of peasant women (*Modernist Women* 4). Behind the portrait description of Madame Alphonse, a French woman with yellow teeth and large earrings, the entire “landscape” of the French tradition emerges in various material signs (the olives of Provence, the sounds of the Mediterranean Sea, language of Molière, baskets of grapes, ducks in wicker cages, ice cream in cornets, men playing boules by a plane tree) (Woolf, “Portraits” 239). Superindividual characteristics begin to appear behind individual traits, interrogating the concept of individualistic selfhood, disconnected from the “external” world. The elements of the immediate and observable environment act here not as a portrait background, but as a means of overcoming the individualistic subject.

Moreover, this portrait reads as a self-reference to the writer’s pivotal essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924), in which she reflects on the impossibility of an objective portrait, as the way the subject is presented differs from artist to artist. Exemplifying her arguments about the inevitable subjectivity of portraiture with the case of Mrs. Brown, an unknown fellow-passenger, Woolf underlines that an artist’s creative consciousness in its turn is conditioned by national literary tradition (“A French writer would rub out all that; he would sacrifice the individual Mrs. Brown to give a more general view of human nature; to make a more abstract, proportioned, and harmonious whole”) (10). In this claim, we observe the above-mentioned trend of a modernist portrait to merge the boundaries between a model and an artist. In the process of portraiture, based on complex intersubjectivity, Woolf underlines the status of modernist selfhood as an act of construction, a narrative process rather than a stable essence.

III. An Intermedial *Dialogue* with Visual Art

Being highly self-reflexive and focused on the crises of representation, literary modernist “portraits” are often constructed through a dialogue with paintings. Examples of this trend toward cross-mediality are remarkably numerous. For instance, in “Letters on Cézanne” (“Briefe über Cézanne,” 1907), Rainer Maria Rilke mentions his special fascination with the artist’s portraits and the influence of Impressionist portraiture on the language of some of his poems (52). He even tried to translate into a verbal form two of Cézanne’s portraits (a portrait of the artist’s wife in a red armchair and one of his early self-portraits), which impressed him with their treatment of individuals as “purely visual objects” (Bridge, 681, 685). Some of Rilke’s poems can be easily read as ekphrastic translations of paintings into poetry. For example, the poem “Balcony” (Der Balkon, 1907) is created as a poetic quotation of a group portrait by Edouard Manet in his painting “Le Balcon” (1868). Speaking about the direct dialogue between literary and pictorial modernists’ portraits, we might turn to Charles Baudelaire’s poem “Portrait” (“Le portrait”) with its central image of a dying beloved, echoing Manet’s portrait of Jeanne Duval. Emilie Sitzia remarks that these two portraits “unveil the double relationship between Manet and Baudelaire,” as well as “between text and image” (150). From her point of view, these portraits emerge in the process of a fruitful collaboration, in the context of which Manet uses the poet’s theoretical underpinning to create his portraits while Baudelaire employs the artist’s images to write his portrait poem.

It is noteworthy that modernist reflection on the portrait genre was not limited by a dialogue with its contemporary pictorial portraiture. Consider, for example, the poem “Portrait of a Lady” (1920) by William Carlos Williams. The title refers to a certain genre portrait scheme, the main component of which is a model’s emphasized dignity and outfit, corresponding to the social status of “lady.” In this portrait poem, Williams marks a specific artistic tradition, with which he enters into a parodic game, mentioning French painters Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean Honoré Fragonard. These two names evoke the Rococo tradition: Watteau is considered the first significant master of Rococo painting, while Fragonard is often regarded as the last major painter of this style. Rococo art presented a whole gallery of ladies’ portraits, distinguished by genteel sentimentality, and sophisticated, coquettish, seductive femininity, decorated with the finest lace and silk.

Williams’s “Portrait” opens with a playfully erotic comparison of female thighs with apple trees:

Your thighs are apple trees
 whose blossoms touch the sky.
 Which sky? The sky
 where Watteau hung a lady’s
 slipper. Your knees
 are a southern breeze — or
 a gust of snow. Agh! what
 sort of man was Fragonard?
 — as if that answered
 anything. Ah, yes — below
 the knees, since the tune
 drops that way, it is
 one of those white summer days,
 the tall grass of your ankles
 flickers upon the shore —
 Which shore? —
 the sand clings to my lips —
 Which shore? (129)

Portraiture’s conventional emphasis on a face is parodically shifted to an anonymous and traditionally taboo part of a female body. The parodic essence of this metaphoric comparison of female

charms with the beauty of natural objects is marked by hyperbolization, turning legs into tall trees and enlarging the female image to a monstrous size. The parodization of the erotic imagery is reinforced in the line, where a polemical “voice” interrupts this description with the unexpected question “Which sky?” The answer to this question reveals the intertextual nature of the previous image (“The sky /where Watteau hung a lady’s slipper”) (Williams, “Portrait” 129). The sky turns out to be a Rococo painted sky. We understand that the poem is a poetic ekphrastic description of a scene from Fragonard’s painting “The Swing” (1795), featuring a pink coquette on a swing, her shoe flying in the sky, and a male beloved to whom this gesture is addressed. Taking into account the obviousness of this apparent allusion to Fragonard’s painting, it remains unclear why Watteau is pointed to as the author of the scene with a lady’s slipper hanging in the sky. It seems that this confusion of the artists’ names is a kind of literary game that corresponds to the Rococo masquerade with its disguised identities.

Questions occur throughout the text, interrupting the flow of the poem’s erotic imagery with their direct interrogation. The metaphoric description of the ankles, which are like “tall grass,” flickering “upon the shore,” is broken in on by the question “on which shore?” that is obsessively repeated, disturbing the poetic flow (Williams, “Portrait,” 129). Within the portrait, there is a deliberate inconsistency and disharmony, caused by this interrogating voice cutting off the chain of erotic metaphors that are used to create a verbal rococo-style portrait of the lady. The “voice” that stubbornly asks the same question (“which shore?”) is ignored by the poet’s “voice” that delivers a metaphorical description. The playful sophistication of the erotic imagery is parodically reduced through this importunate interrogation, that can be associated with the reader or the model. This “argument” hampers the process of portraiture showing the gap between the real model and the artistic formation of her portraiture identity.

The poem has a ring structure, as it ends with the repetitive image of an apple tree from the opening line. Thus, the “portrait” imitates a curl, which is a conceptual style-forming component of Rococo. But in the final line, the image of apple tree petals appears in the context of the disturbing “argument” (“Which shore?/I said petals from an apple tree”) (Williams, “Portrait” 129). As a result, the Rococo-like composition itself becomes the object of a parodic game.

The absence of the heroine’s face in “Portrait of a Lady” is remarkable. We see here another example of a modernist faceless portrait, in which the subject’s face is displaced by her heavily eroticized body. All her metaphorically named charms belong to the lower bodily stratum, which corresponds to the cult of sensual pleasures and refined eroticism of Rococo aesthetics. However, the lack of any imagery associated with the heroine’s face might be read as a reference to Rococo portraiture with its trend of stylizing a natural face, transforming it into a kind of artificial mask (it is not a coincidence that a mask is a frequent attribute of Rococo portraits). In this context, the very process of portraiture is rather about performing and constructing than revealing identity. Interestingly, in “Antoine Watteau” Marcel Proust creates a poetic description of the artist’s pictorial language, describing faces as hidden under uncertain masks (“sous son masque incertain”) and transformed by twilight (“Crépuscule grimant les arbres et les faces”) (81). The underlined artificiality of Rococo portraiture, featuring a human face as ephemeral and mask-like, echoes modernist portraiture with its trend to blur and deform its subject’s face.

In fact, Williams’s “Portrait of a Lady” turns out to be a kind of “anti-portrait.” Through the intertextual appeal to Rococo pictorial imagery, the poet reveals the artificiality of the portraiture process and shows the conditionality of artistic language through the lenses of which the identity is constructed. Ironically, he displays that the portrayed subject is very different from the sitter, who is hampering the process with her annoying questions, revealing a gap between a real person and a constructed portrait image. The poem shows how the portrait of the lady turns into a “portrait of the artist” (Watteau, Fragonard, and Williams, who are involved in the ironic and cross-media dialogue).

IV. Modernist Portraiture and the Concept of Subjectivity

All these examples show that the modernist portrait challenges the Cartesian subject as a crucial product of bourgeois ideology. Promoting new approaches to subjectivity, in modernist portraits painters and writers reconceptualized the notion of an individual as an autonomous, coherent free agent, characterized by unity and distinctiveness. Being the most mimetic art form, that assumes recognition and likeness as basic conditions of its genre definition, the portrait turns out to be the conceptual field where the modernist revolt against realistic resemblance that is claimed to be the true representation of authentic reality becomes most obvious. At the heart of modernist portraiture is a fundamental change in the notion of the subject, who is conceptualized now as fragmented, decentralized, unfixed, and with blurred identity borders. Struggling to free an individual from traditional limiting understanding and focusing on new concepts of selfhood, modernist literary and pictorial portraits reveal that the self is a human-created construction. Defining the goal of modernist portraiture, Pawlikowska quotes a French writer, poet, and visual artist, Antonin Artaud: "Why does an artist distort? Because the model is nothing in itself; only the result, only all the model implies, only everything which, through the mode, can be said to be pulsating, vibrating, anguished or assuaged in life" (25). However, dealing with the unconventionality of a modernist portrait from the point of view of realist aesthetics, we should rather talk about the deformation of realistic portrait vision than "distortion" of the model. We are aware of the innovativeness of modernist portraits, with their non-indexical stance, against the background of realistic portraits.

Featuring subjects as not equal to themselves, a modernist portrait in a certain sense activates the memory of the genre. Archaic portraits appeared in the context of burial rites, serving as ritualistic substitutes for the dead. Their function was not to give a recognizable image of a person, through fixing their individuality, but to guarantee their presence in the eternal cosmic structure. For example, speaking about Egyptian mummy portraits, J. Taylor remarks that "the image of the deceased which these substitutes perpetuated was an idealized one, representing an immortal being endowed with the quality of divinity; it was not intended to recall the appearance of the deceased in life, and hence an authentic likeness was rarely attempted" (9). Egyptian portrait panels had a direct influence on modernist portraits by Matisse and André Derain (Challis, 234). It seems that in the twentieth century, this understanding of portraiture's ontological "increment," revealing the inequality of a portrayed person to himself, encourages the innovative language of the portrait, which seems to be deeply connected with archaic elements of the genre memory.

The generalized nature of archaic portraits should not be regarded as the mere result of artistic "ineptness." It was conditioned by an intention to focus on a superindividual timeless concept of a person's existence. Genetically, the portrait is not determined by the task of creating an illusion of visible reality. The main purpose of the archaic portrait is not to "limit" a person through emphasizing individual features, but to "open," extend a person with the help of portraiture. Apparently, the interest of some modernist artists in the African mask, the influence of which is obvious, for example, in portraits by Picasso, Modigliani, and sculptures by Brancusi, is somehow connected to the genetic memory of the portrait, which goes back to a funeral mask.

In this context, let us recall the history of the creation of Stein's portrait painted by Picasso in 1906. The writer came to the artist's studio for multiple posing sessions (about eighty in total). However, after all these hours of work, he erased the portrait's face. Later, Picasso painted Stein's face without any sittings, making it look like an Iberian mask. Picasso replied to critics, who noted the dissimilarity between the portrait and the model, that this did not matter because in the future Stein would resemble a portrait. As evident from this anecdote, told by Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a portrait's mimetic resemblance to a model was perceived by Picasso as an obstacle to portraiture (12).

Rejecting the concept of likeness and interrogating the subject's borders, modernist portraits encourage us to rethink the very notion of this genre. On the one hand, indeed, the portrait as a highly mimetic genre played a significant role in the construction of the idea of individualism, individuality, and individual. On the other hand, it is in the context of this genre that these concepts were challenged. Exploring the broad history of the portrait as a dynamic, cross-media process enables us to see that the development of portraiture is inseparable from reflections on subjectivity and the evolution of sociocultural ideas about selfhood and the manner of its construction.

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Notes

- ¹ For more on Cocteau's faceless portraits see, for example, David Hammerbeck, "Jean Cocteau, Orpheus, and the Shock of the Old", 175.
- ² For more on this, see Willard Eugene Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* (1991).
- ³ For more on the rivalry between painting and photography see, for example, Diarmuid Costello, *On Photography: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 13.
- ⁴ For more on the concept of the dehumanization of modern art see José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art", 1-50.

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Perceiving Intermedial Romanticism: ‘The Eye sees more than the Heart knows’ and ‘the despotism of the eye’

SERENA QIHUI PEI

Introduction

Unlike the poets in the twenty-first centuries, where the phenomenon of ‘intermediality’ between literature and visual arts is commonly witnessed with the development of modern art movements, Romantic poets in the late eighteenth century seem to align the music more than the painting. Against the long-standing tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, M. H. Abrams writes in *The Mirror and the Lamp*: ‘In place of painting, music becomes the art frequently pointed to as having a profound affinity with poetry. For if a picture seems the nearest thing to a mirror-image of the external world, music, of all the arts, is the most remote’ (Abrams, 50). This notion of mirror-image has the similar attributes to the Platonic conception of the painting in *The Republic*, where Plato maintained the painting is the ‘twice removal’ from ‘the Truth’ or ‘the Form’ (*Republic*, 10.597b–598d). However, this paper argues that the visual arts still play the essential role in shaping Romantic visionary mind beyond the mode of Platonic mimesis.

This paper aims to explore the phenomenon of intermediality in British Romantic poetry, with a particular interest in the interplay between visual arts and poetic visions in William Blake and William Wordsworth. In the first section, William Blake’s unique way of illuminated printing will be introduced, with the specific attention to the making-process and techniques. Then his poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) will be discussed through an intermedial lens exploring the interaction between his paintings and poetry, based on his idea in the motto: ‘The Eye sees more than the Heart knows’. In the second section, the paradoxical representations of visuality in William Wordsworth’s poetry will be emphasized in the dialogue between the idea of ‘the picturesque’ and his concepts of the ‘despotism of the eye’. Particularly, Wordsworth’s *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour* (1798), together with its conversation with William Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* will be focused here. Therefore, different understandings of the relationship between the ‘eye’ and the ‘mind’ or between visuality and vision in Blake’s and Wordsworth’s visionary poetry will be revealed through the comparison between Blake’s ‘The Eye sees more than the heart knows’ and Wordsworth’s ‘the despotism of the eye’.

I. ‘The Eye sees more than the heart knows’: William Blake and His Illuminated Printing

If a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet is a phenomenon worthy of public attention, provided that it exceeds in elegance all former methods, the Author is sure of his reward.

– William Blake, *Prospectus*, October 1793

Renowned as poet, painter, engraver and printmaker at the same time, William Blake doubtlessly can be regarded as one of the most iconic figures illustrating the idea of intermediality in Romantic era. However, that was the age where most of his contemporaries regarded visuality as a negative role in poetic imagination. Wordsworth famously called the eye ‘the most despotic of our senses’ (1805 *Prelude*, xi. 170–75); and as we mentioned earlier, M. H. Abrams’s notable metaphor ‘the mirror and the lamp’, where the mirror symbolizes the empirical mind of traditionally descriptive landscape poetry or visual art, whereas ‘the lamp’ signifies the power of imagination in Romantic visionary poetry, which reflects their assumptions of the ‘superiority of word to image, ear to eye, and voice to print’ (Mitchell, 117). However, perhaps because of his unique perceptions as a visual artist, Blake stood at the opposite – ‘The Eye sees more than the Heart knows’ is the motto at the very beginning of his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, signifying the essential role of visual perception in the interaction between ‘vision’ and ‘visuality’. For most Romantic visionary poets, the imagination or the vision is the power which transcends the mere visualization, as they think the poetry should be the visionary rather than the visualizer, the transformer rather than the translator. Standing at the opposite to the Romantic superiority of the ‘ear’, Blake’s attempt is revolutionary. He offers a possibility of the dialectical harmony, or even a more powerful ‘Eye’, but the ‘eye’ here is symbolizing the ‘visionary prophecy’ (Mitchell, 20), rather than the mere visualization in any traditional sense.

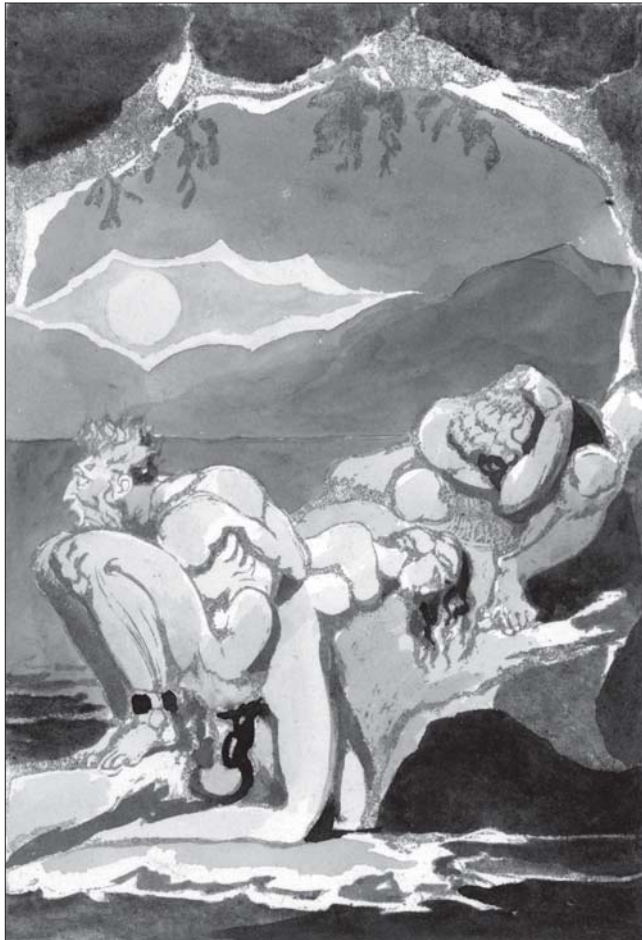


Fig.1. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Plate 1, Frontispiece, 1793.
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Different layers of underlying meanings could be drawn from this comparison between the perceptibility of the eye and the heart: 'The Eye sees more than the Heart knows'. First of all, in the first image (although it appears as the final one in some other copies) in Copy B (Object 1, printed 1793), we can see all the three central characters (Fig. 1): Oothoon is bounded with Bromion back to back, and Theotormon is enclosed himself up by his arms. The whole picture creates an illusion: three characters seem to stay in a cave, and there is the sea and sky outside, but most importantly, the almighty sun together with the nearby gathered clouds creates an image of the 'Eye'.¹ Second, as a painter himself, the visual presentation means more creativity and intimacy to him than to other contemporary poets, as Harold Bloom suggested 'the primacy of perception over the limited wisdom of the natural heart' (101). Third, as for the understanding of how 'the Eye can see more than the Heart knows', the perception of the 'Heart' is also connected with the religious contexts, where the heart is the mediation in communicating with God. But the 'eye' is 'the primacy of perception', which is also connected with Blake's question on the 'place of religion'. But we are not sure that whether or not this cave stands for the 'human mind' and if Blake intends to say that all the activities of these characters are happening inside the 'mind'—that 'religious cave':

At entrance Theotormon sits, wearing the threshold hard
 With secret tears; beneath him sound like waves on a desert shore
 The voice of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with money,
 That Shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires
 Of lust, that belch incessant from the summits of the earth (Blake, 29–33).

Between 1789 and 1795, Blake produced over one hundred engravings and numbers works of illuminate printing. The coming age of the mass reproduction stimulated people's growing taste for the visual novelty between different media and art forms; however, the illuminated printing remained as an inaccessible technique to most of the population in the late eighteenth century. Unlike the traditional practice of artistic production, Blake had the unique methodologies in his illuminated books making. According to Viscomi, no printmaker before Blake had so thoroughly incorporated the tools and techniques of writing, drawing, and painting in a graphic medium, although all the materials and tools were common in engravers' workshop, such as the varnishes, acid, inks, brushes, colours, and paper along with the copper plate. One of the most important inventions is his 'relief-etching'. Unlike Traditional intaglio etchings and engravings, which need to be printed with huge pressure to force paper into the incised lines, which resulted in a 'platemark' or embossment that revealed the plate's shape, thus engravers then squared the plate and bevelled the sides to prevent them from cutting the paper. However, with the relief etching, Blake separated small plates out of larger sheets himself, cutting them in roughly equal size, using either a hammer and chisel or scoring the sheet deeply with a burin and snapping it between boards (Viscomi, 2019). Bentley summarized three main unique features of Blake's techniques:

First, the writing on the copper was put in mirror-writing, so that it would print right-way round on the paper. Second, designs were added to the text, so that the finished work was not just a different and inexpensive method of printing words but an almost entirely new technique uniting text and design which he called 'Illuminated Printing'. Third, the etching was in relief (unlike intaglio method), so that the ink can be transferred from the raised surfaces rather from the recessed hollows. For example, an "O" is made not by drawing a circle (as in intaglio etching) but by removing the outside and the hole, leaving a kind of volcano, the top of which prints the letter (Bentley, 243).

In practice, in order to combine the 'media of poetry' and the 'illuminated design', Blake 'wrote texts and drew illustrations with pens and brushes on copper plates in acid-resistant ink and, with nitric acid, etched away the unprotected metal to bring the composite design into printable relief. He printed the plates in colored inks on a rolling press and tinted most impressions in watercolor' (Viscomi, 2019). In addition, different tools such as pens, brushes, and liquid medium 'enabled Blake to design directly on copper plates as though he were drawing on paper, which in turn encouraged

him to integrate text and illustration on the same page' (Viscomi, 2019). In this way, Blake's works are considered as typical representation of the notion of 'visible language'. According to Mitchell, 'visible language' leads to the interaction between 'the discourse of painting and seeing' and 'verbal expression', which also indicates an 'iconology of the text', based on the representation of objects, the construction of figures and allegorical images (Mitchell 112).

Technically, such integration between the text and the illustration was possible in conventional intaglio etching, but the industry of publishing had long defined etching as image reproduction and letterpress as text reproduction; therefore, the traditional illustrated books were the products of different labours, with illustrations produced and printed in one medium and shop and separately inserted into leaves printed elsewhere in letterpress on another kind of press. Even when words and images were brought together on the same leaf, there were still divisions in the process of production (Viscomi, 2019). But this combination of the various stages of illuminated book production freed Blake to think in the revolutionary ways, together with the help of various tools of drawing and sketching. Therefore, this process enabled his spontaneous thoughts with the first creative spark. According to Viscomi, unlike the traditional prints which were carefully executed with needles, roulettes, and other metal tools, Blake's printing, on the other hand, using the tools of stipple and chalk engraving and techniques of writing and drawing, solved the technical problem of reproducing pen and brush marks in metal. Therefore, he created a multi-media form to bring poetry, painting, and printmaking together, which enormously echoes Romantic idea of spontaneity (Viscomi, 2019).

We can see that Oothoon, the central figure in the poem, says bravely for her love of Theotormon in the Argument: 'I lovèd Theotormon/And I was not ashamed; I trembled in my virgin fears,/And I hid in Leutha's vale!' (Blake, the Argument 1–4). Accordingly, Blake's painting vividly illustrated the voice of Oothoon: as she is depicted on the blossom of a red flower, which symbolizes sexuality and passionate love. When she is later raped by Bromion: 'Bromion rent her with his thunders; on his stormy bed Lay the faint maid,/ and soon her woes appall'd his thunders hoarse' (16–17), Oothoon insists on her inner purity and tells Theotormon: 'Arise, my Theotormon! I am pure, Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black' (51–52). Sadly, Theotormon, responds with silence and ignorance. Later, beginning with 'they told me that' in the first two sentences, Blake vividly expresses his laments on social attitudes towards women in his day via Oothoon's voices. In Oothoon's energetic self-expression: 'they enclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle', we can also see the image of 'a red, round globe', a typical symbol in Blake's painting, which stands for the limited and enclosed human mind.

They told me that the night and day were all that I could see;
They told me that I had five senses to enclose me up;
And they enclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red, round globe, hot burning,
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.
Instead of morn arises a bright shadow, like an eye
In the eastern cloud; instead of night a sickly charnel-house,
That Theotormon hears me not (Blake, 53–60).

This traumatic plot represents Blake's questionings of the conventional morality such as sexual repression of the female body, and the materialist philosophies embedded in Empiricism at that time, in which the 'five senses' have enclosed people's mind. This kind of 'the pictorialist psychology of empiricism and rationalism' (Mitchell, 118) is largely criticized by Romanticists, for example, the notion of 'Romantic Sublime' emphasises on the feeling subjectivity and indescribable sensitivity. As for the illuminated book of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Blake produced a series of drafted versions and each of them is slightly different from one another in terms of their use of hues, materials, and other techniques, for example, on the aspect of colouration. This printing produced twelve copies:

Proof Copy a (black ink, Plates 1–2 and the designs only of Plates 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10), B and C (raw sienna ink), A, D, and E (yellow ochre ink), and H–M (green ink). There were only three later printings: 1794 (color-printed Copies F and R), 1795 (large-paper Copy G and possibly untraced Copy Q), and 1818 (Copies N–P) (Viscomi, 2019).

According to Bentley, Blake regularly printed in brown, blue, green, red, orange, and yellow, as well as in black, and he invented a method of colour-printing in several colours at once, which he applied around 1795–1796. Most of his works he later coloured in water-colours, and this of course gave him the opportunity to improve the prints; sometimes he retraced the letters to clarify them, and sometimes he added features in the design, a bird, say, or a tree (Bentley, 243). In addition, Blake's critique of the colonialism and slavery can be illustrated through characters and their words, together with his paintings, for example, the wood-like figure in dark colour in the middle of the page, but their colours are always different in those copies, which has the potentiality to surmise his political and moral questionings on the society.

Indeed, questioning and doubt are the major themes of the poetry. According to Dwight E. Weber, 'Blake's names, all original with this poem, are functions of their first letters. That is, the poet started with the initial letters and then found apt names to complete each letter, or character'—Daughters, Oothoon, Urizen, Bromion, and Theotormon—these main characters form an anagram for 'DOUBT' (203). Thus, Blake's vision in the poem is tremendously conveyed through the visibility of these five initial letters—'DOUBT'.

According to Mitchell, in the eighteenth-century critics, nature, reason and visual are connected with a homogeneous mode in single perspective but three dimensions. 'The test of a poem became its ability to evoke pictures in the readers' mind, pictures like the ones he would see 'in nature' or in those faithful imitations of nature... From ... to Wordsworth to Keats we find a continuing fascination with verbal paintings of real or ideal places and things. Blake seems especially alien to this tradition' (Mitchell, 20). Blake's 'the Eye sees more than the Heart knows' signifies the essential role of the visual perception, but this 'Eye' means far beyond the simply visual translation in his visionary poems, as he used 'Iconographic code' (Mitchell, 135), for example, 'book and scroll' to mystify the visibility, from materialist or empirical sense to his unique way of transcribing those unrealistic, invisible vision in his prophecy. However, unlike Mitchell's interpretation of Wordsworth's fascination with 'verbal paintings', next section will focus on Wordsworth's warning about the danger of the visibility: the 'despotism of the eye'.

II. William Wordsworth's 'Despotism of the Eye': The Picturesque, Travel Writing and the 'Tintern Abbey'

The state to which I now allude was one
In which the eye was master of the heart,
When that which is in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion.

— William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, xi. 170–75, 1805.

William Wordsworth's notion of the 'despotism of the eye' could be represented in these lines, where he regarded 'the eye' as the master dominating 'the heart' and the visionary mind, and he thought the 'absolute dominion' of the visibility is an obstacle to the imagination of the mind. However, as we mentioned earlier, Mitchell said that Wordsworth was embedded with the tradition of 'painterly poetry', whereas Blake seems alien to this: 'The most obvious consequence of the vogue for "painterly poetry" was, of course, the descriptive poem, a form which, like the nature it described, cut across the boundaries between classicism and romanticism. From Thomson to Wordsworth to Keats we find a continuing fascination with verbal paintings of real or ideal places and things. Blake seems

especially alien to this tradition' (Mitchell 20). Blake avoided the picturesque descriptions in his poetry, since 'the visual world Blake creates here is not the objective, homogeneous "natural" perspective of postmedieval painting; it is more like the kaleidoscopic world of the modern cinematographer' (Mitchell, 21). However, Mitchell's arguments seem to be opposite to Wordsworth's complaint about the 'the master of the eye'. The belief in a 'homogeneous visualizable nature' is basic for 'mutual transference of ways of taste between the visual and verbal arts', and according to Mitchell, 'the test of a poem became its ability to evoke pictures in the reader's mind pictures like the ones he would see "in nature"... Nature, reason, and visual (i.e., homogeneous, single-perspective, three-dimensional) space made it possible for the pleasures of imagination (i.e., visualization) to mean the same thing in poetry and painting' (Mitchell, 20).

Therefore, Wordsworth's 'visuality' seems to be paradoxical in light of the tension between the picturesque description and his visionary imagination. In fact, the interplay between the 'vision' and the 'visuality' is embedded in Wordsworth's poetry in his late life, as Geoffrey H. Hartman puts forward that 'Wordsworth's mature style is characterized by an interaction of visual and visionary, perception and recollection, eye and ear, continuity and discontinuity' (xv). According to Hartman, there is an 'otherworldly' power of imagination, where the imagination tended to seek a separate reality beyond the everyday life: an illusion of a life beyond life, but Wordsworth rarely expressed this flight in 'visionary' terms, as the vision was a symptom of the disease he wanted to cure (xiii). Based on above discussion, this section looks into this paradoxical nature of the interaction between the vision and visuality in Wordsworth's poetics, with a particular focus on the notion of 'picturesque' and Wordsworth's celebration of 'memory'. I argue that, unlike Mitchell's interpretation of 'homogeneous visualizable nature' or 'painterly poetry', Wordsworth's poetry is actually the production from the process of re-creating the visuality through recollection and imagination. The example of Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour* (1798), together with its conversation with William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* will be discussed here from two perspectives: the first one is the very notion of 'the picturesque' in tourism and travel writing at the Romantic age, and the second one is how did the paintings illustrated in the travel book become the inspiration and creative impulses for Wordsworth and how did he transform the picturesque image or the painterly visuality into the visionary poetry.

The idea of 'picturesque' was firstly introduced to Romantic Britain by William Gilpin in *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*, as an aesthetic mode related to 'the beautiful' and 'the sublime'. In his book, William Gilpin recorded his journey down the River Wye in 1770, and he wrote at the very beginning:

We travel for various purposes; to explore the culture of soils; to view the curiosities of art; to survey the beauties of nature; to search for her productions; and to learn the manners of men; their different politics, and modes of life. The following little work proposes a new object of pursuit; that of not barely examining the face of a country; but of examining it by the rules of picturesque beauty (1782, 1–2).

As a result, 'the picturesque' was often associated with tourism and travel writing in Romantic period. Gilpin's travel book was unusual, as Stephen Copley argues, both in their 'pursuit of aesthetic pleasure', and their 'repudiation of the characteristic encyclopedism of the tour form' (134). Different from the earlier age of the 'Reason', led by those empirical philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume, where the scientific mode of observation kept dominating the process of perception, the Romantic period, on the other hand, is characterized by the notions of individuality and emotion, with an emphasis on the travelling 'self' and on bodily or emotional responses to the scenes. As a result, the intermedial connections between Romantic poetry and visual arts are deeply rooted in travel writing and aesthetic landscapes. Visual arts not only can be regarded as the major inspiration for British travellers to the Continent, but also as the attraction for those Romantic appreciation on the beauty of the classic fragments or the ruins, which is one of the most significant parts of their

Grand Tour. From Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Byron's *Don Juan*, Grand Tours have inspired many Romantic canons at that time, and many famous pieces of Romantic poems, essays, and fictions also came out of Romantic writers' accounts of their domestic travels in Britain, for instance, Coleridge's Scotland travel, or Keats's Highland tour.

In addition, the aesthetic commodification of landscape is engaged in picturesque tourism, as Malcolm Andrew notes: 'whereby nature was regarded as a divine realm in contrast to the industrial world, while the rise of consumer culture transformed the natural world into an object of consumption' (Andrew 94). In particular, because of the admiration of sublime nature by those Romantic poets, there appeared a tendency that the 'unspoiled nature' was increasingly idealized in people's mind, appealing more and more middle-class consumers to the Alps, Lake District, the Wye Valley and so on, to experience and taste the Romantic landscape. According to Mary-Ann Constantine: The expanding demographic of tourists in this period dramatically opens up the range of written tours, people from different social classes produce diaries, notebooks, sketchbooks and letters in which the aesthetic codes of the sublime and picturesque...the picturesque mode, promoted in the writings of William Gilpin and enthusiastically emulated by many travellers, entailed the appreciation of landscape in a 'painterly' fashion, and brought an enhanced, and sometimes exaggerated, visibility to the experience of travel around Britain (50).

This 'taste' in landscape was also noticed by landscape designer Uvedale Price in his famous *Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794):

But in these hollow lanes and bye roads all the leading features, and a thousand circumstances of detail, promote the natural intricacy of the ground; the turns are sudden and unprepared; the banks sometimes broken and abrupt; sometimes smooth, and gently but not uniformly sloping; now wildly over-hung with thickets of trees and bushes, now loosely skirted with wood; no regular verge of grass, not cut edges, no distinct lines of separation; all immixed and blended together, and the border of the road itself, shaped by the mere tread of passengers and animals, is as unconstrained as the footsteps that formed it; even the tracks of the wheels (for no circumstance is indifferent) contribute to the picturesque effect of the whole; the lines they describe are full of variety; they just mark the way among trees and bushes, while any obstacle, a cluster of low thorns, a furze-bush, a tussuck, a large stone, will force the wheels into sudden and intricate turns, at the same time those obstacles themselves, either wholly or partially concealing the former ones, add to that variety and intricacy: often a group of trees, or a thicket, will occasion the road to separate in two parts, leaving a sort of island in the middle, and of these and numberless other accidents painters have continually availed themselves (4).

Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour* is strongly connected with the travel writing and the notion of 'picturesque' at that time, and this tour was originally inspired by the illustration of the Tintern Abbey in William Gilpin's book. Followed by the painting of Tintern Abbey, Gilpin wrote:

From Monmouth we reached, by a late breakfast-hour, the noble ruin of Tintern-abbey; which belongs to the Duke of Beaufort; and is esteemed, with its appendages, the most beautiful and picturesque view on the river...It occupies a gentle eminence in the middle of a circle valley, beautifully screened on all sides by woody hills; through which the river winds it's course; and the hills, closing on it's entrance, and on it's exit, leave no room for inclement blasts to enter (46).

Inspired by William Gilpin's depiction of its picturesque scenery and the illustration of the Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth visited the Wye Valley in 1798, where he observed: 'a purely sensuous love of Nature, his delight in the colour and form of things; his perception of nature as a spiritual path and his consideration of a union between man and nature' (Harding 98).

However, this picturesque visibility is not the most essential part in his poetic creation, as Wordsworth famously regarded Poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' (307). We can see a twofold transformation of the visibility here: the original image of the picturesque landscape firstly stimulates the poet's sensitivity,

and then these feelings and emotion are transformed via his memory with the decoration of imagination into the verbal description. Admittedly, the 'eye' helps him to obtain the primary stimuli, but the danger of the 'despotism of the eye' exists in the situation: if the poets rely too much on the visual primacy and visual accuracy, just like the previous empirical mode in the Enlightenment period, then the power of imagination and the creativity of the mind will be damaged.

During their trip at the Wye Valley, Tintern Abbey is the most attractive place in Wordsworth's memory, and he began to compose a poem in his head, and he finished it just as they arrived back in Bristol on the evening of 13 July:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky (Wordsworth 1–8).

On the recreation of the previous image of the Tintern Abbey and depictions of the surrounding landscape in Gilpin's book, the current visualization of his memory of 'lofty cliffs', 'mountain-springs' and the 'landscape with the quiet of the sky' are now interwoven as a consistent whole in Wordsworth's mind. 'No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this', Wordsworth recalled more than forty years later, 'not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol' (5). Consequently, *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* was published a few weeks later as the conclusion to *Lyrical Ballads*; it has since become the best-known literary response to the beauty of the Wye. The unforgettable Wye has been treasured predominantly throughout his life. In the summer of 1812, when his wife Mary visited there, he wrote to her:

You cannot think how much dearer the Wye is to me since you have seen it. I love it deeply before on most tender remembrances and considerations but now you have seen it also and know it, and we now can talk of it together what a sanctity will it attain in my mind, and of all my poems The one in which I speak of it will be the most beloved by me (Hebron 19).

William Blake and William Wordsworth could be regarded as two iconic giants in the British Romanticism, and both of them had a keen interest in the interplay between visual and verbal expression. Although Blake's notion of 'The Eye sees more than the Heart knows' and Wordsworth's concept of the 'despotism of the eye' seem to be contradictory with each other, their underlying harmonious consistency exists in the depth of the Romantic imagination. For Blake, the representation of the visual art is his unique artistic way to transform those unrealistic visions in his dream-like prophecy with the help of illuminated printing; as for Wordsworth, the visionary poetry is the transcendence of the picturesque landscape into a spiritual image through the recreating process of the memory.

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Notes

- ¹ Blake might be inspired by the illustration in Francis Quarles's book when he was creating this image, where beneath the all-seeing Eye, the Sacred love holding a heart, and Cupid, holding an orb, are quarrelling. See Francis Quarles, *Emblems and Hieroglyphics of the life of man, modernized in four books* (1773, 66). <https://archive.org/details/francisquarlesem00quar>

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Susan Howe's *That This*: Art at the Limits of the Canvas and the Page

SIBYL GALLUS-PRICE

Abstract: Susan Howe's difficulty has often led critics to address her poetry in relation to language poets and abstract expressionists causing many to read her poems as painterly hybrids dependent on reader-beholder experience rather than meaning. Putting Howe's poetry in conversation with Modernist painting, I establish that Howe's painterly aspects, like her 1960s counterparts on the verge of an ontological crisis, cease to be painterly. Although Howe's poems engage with the problems at the end of Modernist painting—the possibility of white space and pictorial composition—they do so with a canvas that has come to function like a page.

Keywords: painting, poetry, canvas, page

While most poems raise the question: what does this mean? Few poems prompt the question: what is that? What constitutes Susan Howe's oft-cited radicalism, I argue, is that unlike most poets, her poems do both. Indeed, what we'll see in *That This*—already announcing a commitment to this conflictual duality in the deictic circularity of its title—is that in uniting these two questions Howe produces an aesthetically unyielding if aporetic form. While Howe's works arguably dwell in the interstices of image and text, painting and poetry, the canvas and the page, the hermeneutic and ontological bond she calls forth points not to the artwork's unknowability or its transgression of medium, I hold, but precisely the opposite, the assertion of meaning suspended by its limits. While often labeled a language poet for the interpretive difficulty her poetry poses, Howe's *That This*, I contend, returns here as a critical interlocutor of a movement whose inaugural publication was not uncoincidentally entitled, *This*. In the first issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* David Melnick, an early contributor, points to the relationship shared by words and images, readers and meaning:

The poems are made of what look like words and phrases but are not. I think these poems look like they should¹ mean something more than other wordless poems do. At the same time, you know that you can't begin to understand what they mean. What can such poems do for you? You are a spider strangling in your own web, suffocated by meaning. You ask to be freed by these poems from the intolerable burden of trying to understand.

Howe's *That This*, I argue, presents a challenge to Melnick's early statement, not only in producing forms "made of what look like words and phrases but are not," but in devising an artwork that comes to "mean something more than other wordless poems" or even visual arts do. Generating an artwork suspended between image and text, whose ontological and hermeneutic demands are (by design) always mutually entailed, Susan Howe's *That This* makes good on Melnick's provocation to "wordless poems." What Howe's aesthetic forms guarantee is that in advancing questions about what the work means, one is already posing questions about what it is, and in advancing questions about what the work is, one is already posing questions about what it means.

Susan's Howe's "Frolic Architecture," therefore, produces a structure in which any attempt to understand it, as in fact we will see, brings out a particular set of problems. While Howe's forms are

“made of what look like words and phrases but are not,” her aim is not to free the reader “from the intolerable burden of trying to understand,” but, ontologically speaking, to ensure such a “burden.” Indeed, in their commitment to preserving this epistemological “burden” by any means, Howe’s poems, produces a readerly encounter tantamount not to freedom but to ensnarement, “the way a cobweb catches a fly” (Howe 13). To put it more precisely, the whole point of Howe’s *That This*, as I will show, is to produce a work in which ontological questions are always crucially inseparable from hermeneutic ones.

In looking at the first two examples from Howe’s “Frolic Architecture” such a distinction is apparent right away. In fact, Howe’s iterations explicitly enact such a distinction.

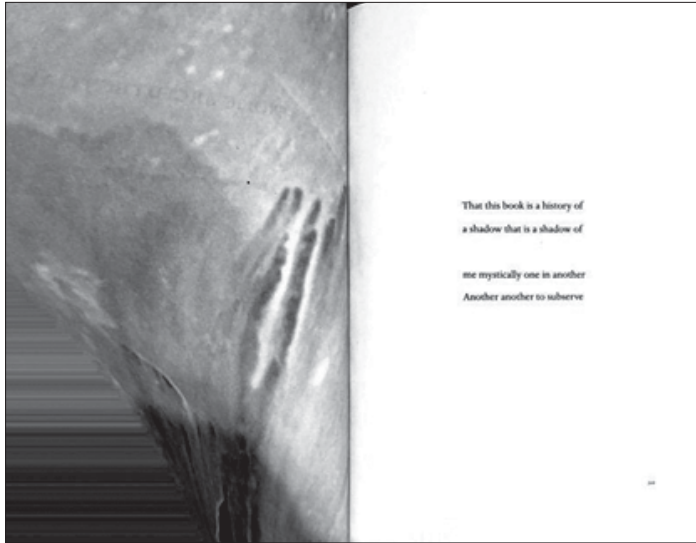


Figure 1. From Susan Howe, ‘Frolic Architecture’ (2010: 38–39).

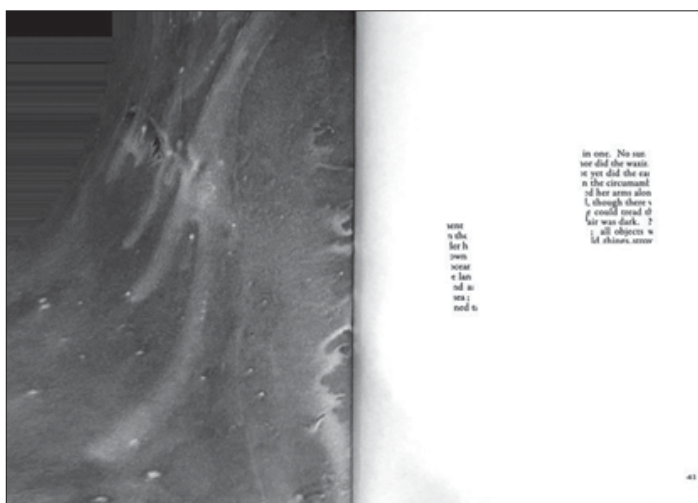


Figure 2. From Susan Howe, ‘Frolic Architecture’ (2010: 40–41).

The first line of figure 1, "That this book is a history of," immediately illustrates the poem's hermeneutically embedded difficulties (39). "That" and "of," the words bookending the phrase "this book is a history," signal straightaway the interpretive obstacles imposed by the poem's formal boundaries. Beginning with an incomplete relative clause that functions as an unknown antecedent and ending mid prepositional phrase makes the line especially difficult to understand. It's not so much that getting beyond these grammatical stumbling blocks is impossible, but rather that their constitutive incompleteness in itself marks them with a complexity whose implications can't yet be understood in the context of the line. Hence beginning with the subordinate conjunction "That" and ending with the preposition "of" emphasizes the line's suspended quality such that its grammatical demands surrender to its hermeneutical ones. "That" and "of," therefore, provoke a series of perplexing interpretive questions. Firstly, on which antecedent does the "That" of "That this book is a history of" depend? Secondly, whose history is it? In other words, what is the history "a history of"?

By contrast, the fundamental concern raised by figure 2 pertains not to a question of what the first line means, nor even to knowing which line is the first, but the difficulty of knowing what would constitute a line at all. While figure 1 contains a line immediately understood as poetry, figure 2 consists of two irregularly shaped blocks of text organized around a white space at the center of the page. What was initially and unproblematically understood as a line of poetry—a phrase, a letter, a poem, or a text—in figure 1 is challenged by the presence of figure 2. Whereas figure 1 invites an inquiry about what the line means, what the phrases mean, or what the words mean in the context of the poem, figure 2 conversely consigns such an inquiry to determining what a line is, what a phrase is, what a word is, or, to put it more precisely, what a poem is. So, if figure 1 activates a series of hermeneutic questions, figure 2 guarantees that proceeding with any hermeneutic process first requires an engagement with questions of an ontological order.

The question of the line or the lack thereof emphasizes the extent to which poetry, as it's commonly understood, depends upon the line. In its absence, elements that formally constitute a line suddenly no longer seem to matter. Hence, the inability to identify the first line, or any line, undercuts any attempt to reproduce the kinds of questions relevant to figure 1. Answering questions about what a line means, even an interpretively demanding one, requires first knowing what that line is; therefore, the conspicuous lack of a line in figure 2 constitutes not just a hermeneutic difficulty but an ontological obstruction. The discrepancy holding figure 1 and figure 2 in tension doesn't arise along an axis in which hermeneutic concerns inch toward unintelligibility, rather the contrast between the two establishes something more like an ontological *volte-face*. To put it in slightly different terms, the line in figure 2 has dematerialized. In fact, this abrupt ontological shift comprises, in part, the meaning that such a contrast intends. The readability of the line's disappearance in figure 2 depends upon a juxtaposition with its predecessor. In other words, disappearance only happens with figures 1 and 2 side by side. That's not to say that figure 1 causes the line to disappear, but that the presence of the line in figure 1 makes the line's erasure in figure 2 legible. The point is not that the textual fragments of figure 2 mark it as an impossible text, but that alongside figure 1 they raise the problem of the limits of a text.

No longer structured by the line but by the shape of the textual fragments themselves, the organization of the strategically fashioned shapes on the page disallow any discernible organization of words into lines. So, while figure 1 insists upon a meaning that depends on what comes before and what comes after, the fragments of figure 2 provoke questions about what might constitute a beginning or an ending at all. Whereas in Figure 1 the addition of "That" and "of," produces a line that embodies its own formal poetic suspension, the fragments in figure 2, hovering affixed rather than inscribed, present themselves to view suspended quite literally on the white space of the page. The slight angle of the left-hand column-like textual scrap calls attention to the position of the left and right-hand structures juxtaposed near the page's center. Placed as much as written, the slight slant of the text points toward the center of the page calling attention to the white space between the two

floating, column-like structures, and the fact that neither the structures nor the remainder of the page offer points of entry or exit. The left-hand column offers no more a plausible starting point than the right-hand one, and, in fact, the same could be said about the white space at the center of the page.

In approaching figure 2, therefore, it's not readily apparent where or how to begin, or what would even constitute a beginning. Certainly, in the case of figure 2 distinguishing a beginning from an ending would seem like an arbitrary task. What's available instead are two blocks of image of varying size, angle, and position—things literally suspended in some uncharted middle. In fact, we might imagine figure 2 as a kind of *in medias res* in which the beginning of one form is consequently the end of another. What we cannot do, however, is immediately understand where the text begins and the image ends. No longer structured by the line but by the shape of the textual fragments themselves, the organization of the figures, no longer depends upon the line but the architecture of the page. Indeed, comparing figure 1 to figure 2 makes this *in medias res* all the more clear.

Figure 1's phrase, "That this book is a history of," as we have seen, begins as a line suspended. Held in suspension by a clause whose interpretation depends on an antecedent that isn't there and a preposition whose relationship is left pending, the *in medias res* characterizing the first line in figure 1, is a line suspended in the middle of its meaning. While enjambment would be the formal term typically deployed for a line ending mid-sentence, mid-thought, or mid-meaning, in this instance, the *in medias res* quality arises from the line's incompleteness on both fronts, a suspended end and beginning. The line has a clear ending and beginning, but it's difficult to know what these beginning and endings mean. Since the line, unlike the sentence, is, in some sense, dependent on the literalness of its form, the doubly incomplete grammatical structure of "that" and "of" puts the line and the sentence in tension. The terminal "of" doesn't simply dangle phenomenologically against the emptiness of the page but acts in tandem with the incompleteness of "That." Hence suspended *in medias res* "That this book is a history of" goes beyond the usual visual anticipation of an enjambed line or the readerly suspense of an incomplete sentence, pointing instead to a relationship of parts to whole and their meanings. Indeed, the parts "That" and "of," as I have demonstrated, advance a series of hermeneutic questions directed not merely to the lines to come but toward the words internal to the line.

Conversely in figure 2, scraps cut and pasted realize a literalized *in medias res*, materially speaking, both of and in the middle of things. Whereas the *in medias res* of epics characteristically starts in the middle of an ongoing plot, figure 2 enacts the literal version of Horace's *Ars Poetica* by beginning in the middle of things. Extracted from the middle of a text, the scraps, shapes affixed around a center, compose the space on the (formerly) blank page. Figure 2 repeats the *in medias res* of figure 1, beginning not as a line suspended but as the white space actualized between the two staggered scraps flanked left and right. The shapes and the white space arise conjointly. White space transforms words into shapes and those shapes, in turn, give the white space a shape of its own. Annexed by the white space, these blocks of interrupted text, things literally suspended in a middle, become part of the page's composition.² In the absence of such white space, the partially effaced words and letters amount to scraps of incomplete text, but as part of it, the contours of the scraps become shapes, *things* not only suspended but integral to Howe's compositional whole. Hence if the structural conditions of beginning the epic *in medias res* produce two points of interest for the reader, what happened before and what will happen after, here those literalized conditions produce a composition amidst the before and after the moment the scraps mark the page. To put it another way: they embody action, Howe's action, in the way that a blank page or the source page of the text cannot. Rather than introduce a tension that appeals to the suspense of a listener or a viewer, as the *in medias res* of epics typically does, Howe's literal version gives rise to an ontological tension suspending both the limits of image and text. Unlike figure 1, a sentence suspended between something that has come before and something yet to come, figure 2, its literal counterpart plucked from its source, transforms before and after into the before and after of lines. Whereas in figure 1 the addition of "That" and "of," produces a line that embodies its own formal poetic suspension, the fragments affixed in figure 2

present themselves to be viewed suspended amidst the white space. In figure 2 there are no lines as such and consequently no occasion for endings and beginnings, but rather a compositional space arrested *in medias res*.

As suggested, figure 2 is concerned with shapes rather than lines. In figure 2 the shape of words and letters—what were perhaps formerly parts of lines or phrases—supplies not only the architecture of the columns, the two scraps of text positioned near the center of the page, but an architecture for the page's entirety. As soon as we understand text as an architectural element, as shape with the possibility of arrangement, the space of the page can no longer be considered incidental. It should be evident then that while the space between the lines in figure 1 is carefully specified, as spaces at the end or between lines of poetry usually are, their progression from left to right and from top to bottom raises no questions of their arrangement as shape. Certainly, applying the considerations of figure 2 to figure 1 would only further illustrate this discrepancy. Since it's true that the line, at least in part, is a primary defining feature of poetry, addressing the structural constellation of the lines in figure 1, would only call further attention to formal concerns. Like the lines of most poems, the four lines composing figure 1 gesture toward questions of their formal feasibility, let's say, as a quatrain or four-line stanza. To rehearse the same discrepancy another way, citing a line from figure 1, "That this book is a history of," would pose no problem. One would find no grounds for hesitation in calling the four lines a text. So, although the particularity of spaces in figure 1 might contribute to the poem's overall meaning, the way formal elements of a line often do, their shape, spatial arrangement, or relationship to the white space of the page do not. They don't matter in the same way that they would in figure 2 or as would be commonly understood in a painting or a drawing.

Indeed, critics like Elisabeth Joyce and John Harkey, quite rightly, observe that with such a use of internal space in Howe, painting immediately comes to mind. In her chapter "When Text Becomes Images" Joyce summarizes Howe's artistic process as a painterly one:

It is as if Howe is using letters as her medium for painting and throwing them on the page in much the same way that Jackson Pollock applied paint to the canvas. The white of the page becomes an active part of the composition that interacts with the black lines, so that it becomes a medium of equal weight with the black of the letters. The overlaying and the indecipherability create a field of visual depth, the type of depth created by Pollock in his drip paintings like his *Number 1, 1948* (127).

Though Pollock surfaces here as Howe's painterly counterpart, Joyce, like many, situates the poet's writerly developments across a sampling of visual artists. Alongside Pollock, Joyce draws parallels with "that of collage, or a kind of word cubism" (116) tracing the visual and textual spaces in Howe's block poetry and collage poems back to her well-known affinity with minimalist artists like Agnes Martin (112). Harkey reiterates Joyce's claims drawing similar parallels between Howe's work and the "grid-like paintings" of Agnes Martin and Ad Reinhardt (161). To Harkey and Joyce's list, one might add any number of abstract expressionists (161). Indeed, Howe herself regularly furnishes her own lengthy list of artistic influences in her interviews.³

Although her beginnings as a visual artist and her relationship to the art of the 1960s are in no way irrelevant, analogies—driven by an impulse to ground her work in a constellation of personal experiences and affiliations—often fail to address the kinds of problems her work advances. In furnishing her own equivalent, Howe reveals that pursuing equivalence in sameness, with paintings that look like her poems, misses the force of her interventions. Pressed to provide a definitive visual counterpart for her work, Howe declares: "It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White" (Keller). Understanding the relationship between the textual and the visual demands an equivalence beyond the visually analogous. On the contrary, we must, as Howe does, address the thing which holds text and image in tension—white space.

What we can see in figure 2 is that, unlike figure 1, space does indeed matter. Unlike figure 1, in figure 2 there's no means of distinguishing to what extent space might matter simply by reading the text on the page or by evaluating its typographic positioning. Instead, what is distinguishable is a

positive space—a scrap of text—and a negative space—the remainder of the page. Reconsidering the way Howe imagines her painterly equivalent—“It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White”—allows us to see not only the relationships between the white space and the figures but the way in which Howe calls white space into being. Empty space only registers as white space because it's marked by the textual scraps arranged on the page. Just as the line's disappearance in figure 2 is made legible by its appearance in figure 1, the white space in figure 2 appears because it's marked by objects. If immediately following figure 1, Howe were to produce figure 2 as a blank page—a page free of writing, marks, or textual scraps—such a page would fail to signify as anything other than blank, empty, or unused. In the context of the book, the space of the page, its size, its rectangular shape, and its white color would all fail to matter in and of themselves. There are many things that a blank page could represent: absence, emptiness, omission, or even some failure on the part of the publisher, but what it could not do is signify as white space. While a blank, empty, or unused page has the potential to invite hermeneutic questions about what it means to leave a page blank, no questions would be raised about whether or not a blank page is, in fact, a page. Indeed, its emptiness would only further emphasize its “pageliness.”⁴ Conversely, a page marked by textual scraps would, first and foremost, raise the question of what the page is, in short, what the whiteness is. In other words, it could no longer be considered merely a page. The point is not that the ontological concerns raised by the entirety of the page in figure 2 would render it uninterpretable, but that to consider what the sum of the page and its parts mean, the page, the interior of its shape, the white space, and the arrangement of the image and text within it would all need to matter.

What does it mean for everything to matter? Here once again, a return to the distinction between figure 1 and figure 2 proves useful. Consider the earlier discussion of figure 1 that led me to quote the first of four lines, “That this book is a history of.” In examining the line's hermeneutic difficulties I began, as we typically do in essays like this one, by citing the line. Nothing could be more straightforward. Of course, even more obvious but perhaps less self-evident, in quoting the line, I haven't made everything matter. My line doesn't look exactly like Howe's original since neither the particular shape of the letters, nor the exactness of their spatial arrangement enters into consideration. Naturally, though the kinds of white space between letters and words follow necessary conventions, with generally less space between letters than words, that standard convention is only ever one we seek to approximate. In the context of writing an essay such as this one, when citing the line on the page, we wouldn't task ourselves to uphold the original margins or the many typographic conventions. Certainly, what authorizes us to talk about a line outside its original context is citation. The organizing features of a text permit us to readily cite it, precisely because some things matter more than others.

But obviously, this isn't true of figure 2. Noting, first, the difficulty of identifying individual lines and, second, the role played by a compositional rather than textual white space, it's obvious that in the case of figure 2 citation is at the very least inadequate. How do we cite the compositional? How do we cite white space or shapes? Thus, another way to think about the tension between figure 2 and figure 1 is to consider what it means that we have to reproduce words rather than cite them. The architecture of figure 2 not only motivates ontological questions about what it is but any discussion of it, inevitably requires that we reproduce rather than quote it. Where, in figure 1 we can cite a portion of a line, trying to do the equivalent for figure 2 demands something more like description or reproducing a detail. Indeed, it is precisely that difference that has pushed me into identifying and even exhibiting the two texts I have been writing about as figure 1 and figure 2 as opposed to the first poem and the second poem.

Unlike the readily citable figure 1, figure 2 reveals only textual scraps inseparable from their spatial arrangement. Any attempt to cite phrases, words, partial words, or letters from within the scraps means addressing the contour and arrangement of the shapes themselves along with the corresponding shape of the white space. Just as the space on the page is no longer arbitrary, the irregular shape of the textual scrap too embodies a presence as integral (as any word) to the compo-

sition. In fact, the idiosyncratic shape of these scraps only reinforces the way in which their most minute curvatures, map and shape the subtleties of the white space. When everything matters, in other words, as soon as the entirety of the space of the page matters, the page in question, like a painting, can only be reproduced.

This is what it means to think of Howe's aesthetic as being like a painter's, and it's presumably what Howe meant when, in response to the question about a visual counterpart to her work, she responded: "It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White." But while Howe's use of the page like the space of a canvas, on the surface, seems to place her in the purview of the painter, the obvious contradiction is that her own compositional spaces are anything but blank. Howe's counterpart is not just any painting but something that addresses the very limits of painting, limits that themselves would come to be commensurate with the limits of the page.

In hailing the blank white canvas, Howe exposes not only her limited commitment to an aesthetic generalizable to painting but gestures toward the ways in which the painting of the 1960s had already faced a limit and ontological crisis of its own. After all, the whole point of the blank canvas introduced by critic Clement Greenberg in "Modernist Painting," was that it illustrated the limits of painting, a limit he saw as flatness (5). Indeed, it was Greenberg's advocacy of the purity of painting as flatness that led him to make the claim in "After Abstract Expressionism" that "a stretched or tacked up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily a successful one" (30). What Modernist painting demanded was not a painting you could look into but look at, a (pre)condition that made the illusion of deep space impossible. Hence the blank white canvas was an opportunity for artists, not because it expressed a painterly aesthetic, but just the opposite: it was the moment when a Modernist vision of painting had reached its limit, a moment when painting could cease to be painterly.

For art critic Michael Fried the literalism of the canvas as mere object introduced by Greenberg signaled not the limit case for painting but the endpoint of painting and Modernist art as such. Making flatness painting's limit, Fried argues in his essay "Art and Objecthood" reduced the canvas to a condition that was "wholly literal" and hence something already "beyond painting," what in his 1967 essay he calls "objecthood" (36). So, while Greenberg saw painting's limit as the blank canvas, for Fried that canvas, already consigned to objecthood, could only command painterly limits by restoring an element of the pictorial. Fried found such an example in painter Morris Louis: "it occurred to me that Louis's unfurled may be taken as showing what, in fact, was required in order that a large expanse of canvas compel conviction as painting, that is, be endowed with specifically pictorial not simply literal, significance" (Morris Louis 40). To compel such conviction the limit case for painting couldn't be blank, as Greenberg contended, but required, as Fried saw it, a canvas that could mobilize a blankness in the effort to depict its own illusion of flatness, flatness that would turn painting into the page. Such a requirement aligns the limit of painting not with the blankness of the canvas, but more with marks on the page.⁵ As Fried describes in "Morris Louis":

it is as though drawing's primitive character as mark, as something decisive, irreversible, even cataclysmic that happens on, and to, the blank page or canvas—something that, thereafter, is manifest both in its own right, as a unique entity, and in its ineluctable consequences for the perfect blankness and apparent flatness of the original sheet—is, in these paintings, made perspicuous as never before (119).

Liberating the blank canvas from objecthood meant regaining a pictorially meaningful illusion of flatness, but one that would serve as a limit case for painting by turning a blank canvas into a marked page. Louis produced for Fried, "no equivalent in the work of any other painter," not merely for his emphasis on the bare canvas or its "sheer primacy," but in generating a painting that could internally mark its own blankness as such. Hence for Fried, only a painting that—like a page—retained the "firstness of marking" could both suspend objecthood and approach the flatness Greenberg sought in the limit of the blank canvas (119). What generated the closest thing to Greenberg's canvas, the very painterly equivalent Howe invokes, was a painting that by necessity takes on the character of a page. The rivulets of color marking the left and right banks of Louis's unfurled produce a limit case not

only insofar as they possess the capacity to “simultaneously destroy and make [the canvas] pictorially meaningful,” as Fried asserts, but because they depict the illusion of flatness as “(the blankness, one feels, of an enormous page)” (119). For Fried the blank canvas only works as a painting insofar as it’s a pictorially marked flatness, and that flatness only works insofar as that flatness is the flatness of a page.

Further reinforcing the structure of the page in Louis’s unfurleds was the illusion of closeness they produced. As Fried explains:

experiencing the unfurled means seeing but being unable to bear down on the rivulets of color: as though one were physically too close to the unfurled to be able to bring everything they comprise into simultaneous focus—as though one were compelled by that closeness to focus, to look, infinitely beyond them. And yet stepping back changes nothing. The illusory closeness of the unfurled—which is what *makes* the blankness of the canvas seem like that of an enormous page—as well as a vertiginous ‘beyond’ they open onto, belong not to one’s actual situation viewing them, but to the paintings themselves (122).

What this means is that no matter where we stand, we feel too close to see the streams of color on both the left and right banks at the same time. The positioning of the markings of color on the canvas belong not to the beholder’s “actual situation” but to the canvas itself and refusing that deep space in exchange for a pictorial flatness that keeps the beholder out renders the canvas with a flatness that could only be described as a page.

Hence the blank white canvas, with which Howe equates her work, is a painting whose markings, like Howe’s, call forth a white space that even as it seeks to render a kind of purity and meaningfulness to its composition, can only do so through the discovery of the canvas as a page. As it happens, Howe starts with the page not with the canvas. And it’s this starting point that allows her to meet Louis at a flatness of painting already long in tension with the page. Even though figure 1 readily reads from left to right and figure 2 seems to obstruct that, with Louis’s unfurleds in mind, we can see that even when taken to radical extremes Howe’s poems still embrace the logic of the page. What we can see once and for all is that even as Howe’s compositional structures work like a canvas, that canvas has already met its limits. Though figure 2 does indeed possess the compositional structure of a painting, that painting epitomizes, as Fried demonstrates, a page’s flatness. Whether we consider Howe’s scraps of text in figure 2 to be rivulets of text akin to Louis’s rivulets of color arranged on the white space, Howe’s figure 2 like Louis’s unfurleds, produces a totality that’s impossible to capture, an experience that belongs not to the beholder but to the structure of work. And it’s this impossibility inherent to both that produces something that works like Figure 1’s page. Hence while it’s clear that Howe isn’t the first poet to capitalize on the white space in a poem, since the line on the page is already in some sense literal, what is true is that with the primacy she gives it, Howe like Louis, addresses the question of limits.

As we have begun to see, figure 1 belongs as much to Howe’s practice as figure 2. And though figure 2 embodies a compositional logic not unlike a painting, that structure much like figure 1, can only do so by reinforcing the flatness of the page. Moreover, this flatness is only further emphasized by the fact that each of them, in the book, is opposite a work (a Welling photogram) deeply determined by a visual rather than a textual logic, and the fact that each is on a page rather than a canvas, begins to suggest a certain limit to Howe’s appeal to painting. Welling’s photograms, like every photograph, produce literal rather than perspectival illusion, the depth in the things themselves. While the minimalism of Welling’s photograms calls attention to the flatness of their surface, the negative images left by the shadow, the place in which two things touch, reaches the illusion of deep space. The photograms consisting of nothing more than the projection of paint and Welling’s folding of the thin mylar onto photographic paper, produce the illusion of depth, and it’s this projected three-dimensionality that calls attention to the flatness we see in Howe’s figures on the opposite page. Despite their equivalent flatness, Welling’s photograms insist on an illusion of depth so that the things that appear deep in it seem far away and the things that appear near the surface seem

closer. Because we can look into them, they position us somewhere in space. Conversely, we can recall that for Howe's figure 2 and Louis's unfurleds, where the beholder stands doesn't matter. For both Louis and Howe, the compositional logic produces a flatness that ultimately depends on the logic of a page, and what was crucial to the page, Fried insists, was that it made the question of our position in space completely irrelevant, an irrelevance that demanded our submission to the logic internal to the page. Hence, in Fried's terms, whether looking at figure 2 or figure 1, we see it the way we would any page, something we look at rather than look into.

It's not quite right, then, to maintain, as many have, that Howe's page belongs to a logic that could be called painterly. The claim that figure 2 or the many figures of "Frolic Architecture" merely function like paintings proves inadequate. In fact, we can have a poet like Howe and a painter like Louis precisely because the page and the canvas exist in tension rather than as equivalents. The point is not, therefore, as Joyce contends, that "letters themselves become . . . the equivalent of the strokes of a paintbrush" (127) or that Howe's words, "thrown" or "splashed across the page," are reduced to a condition of "instability . . . explosiveness . . . changeability, rapid evaporation, transience, and even loss of retention" (104). Nor can we agree with critics resigned to see Howe's "page as a kind of canvas," as Alan Golding does in "Drawing with Words," a stance meant to support the claim that Howe's "poems deny the possibility both of an authoritative point-of-view within the text or an authoritative movement through it" (161). Positions that align print with stability and painting with instability not only undermine our ability to assess Howe's structural relationships, which depend on her ability to produce the limits of both the textual and the visual, they overwrite any relationship at all.

Engaging a dialectic of the fundamental aesthetic problems facing the visual and literary, Howe produces an artwork sustained by the limits of both. Howe's work suggests something beyond painting with words—a poem-painting equivalent "freed" from meaning—committing instead to the deictic reciprocity of limits—an art "suffocated by meaning." Howe deals in image and text not to undermine medium, but rather to point to its necessary limits. In raising hermeneutic claims alongside ontological ones and holding the limits of painting in tension with the limits of the page Howe, I argue, ensures not only meaning's epistemological burden but the limits of medium.

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Notes

¹ Melnick underlines "should" in the original issue of $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$.

² Howe's commitment to composition calls poet Charles Olson to mind. Indeed, in interviews Howe regularly cites Olson as an influence (see the interviews "Susan Howe the Art of Poetry, 97" in the Paris review, and "An Open Field: Susan Howe in Conversation" at Poets.org). No doubt her poems take the "act of composition" (50) first outlined in Olson's "Objective Verse" seriously. As Howe herself explains it, "[F]or Olson the syllable and the line make the poem—to that pair I would also add the margin" ("An Open Field"). For Howe, then, addressing Olson's "composition by field" in earnest means making that field literal. Howe not only addresses Olson's project to produce a poem beyond the "old base" of the "inherited line, stanza, all-over form," (52) she composes a work that exceeds the relations of line and the syllable by embracing the space on the page. In doing so she moves beyond Olson's dependence on the voice and the "breath" (53). Howe does this not by disbanding "the conventions which logic has forced on syntax" (56) as Olson advocates, but precisely by raising the stakes of the poem's compositional notion of syntax and aesthetic logic.

³ In addition to the influence of her late husband sculptor David von Schlegell and former housemate Marcia Hafif, Howe adds "Richard Serra, Joan Jonas, Don Judd, Eva Hesse, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, John Cage, Agnes Martin . . . the work of these artists influenced what I was doing" (Keller).

⁴ In fact, we can see this staged in the last four pages of the book when Howe omits pages 106, 107, and 108. While we can speculate on what this omission means or represents, a way of pointing to how the three parts as a single whole, we cannot envision them blank as canvases.

⁵ This line of inquiry follows Walter Benn Michaels's "When I Raise My Arm" which first develops Fried's argument about the canvas and the page in relation to intention and Anscombe's theory of action.

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Textural Aesthetics in the Avant-garde Art Practice of Nilima Sheikh and Rajyashri Goody

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Abstract: Deeptha Achar's text on the rise of the woman artist in India, indicates that formulating an aesthetic of the personal is a locus for defining the practice of contemporary women artists. Apropos visual art, textual material often forms an appeal to this aesthetics of the personal. In this paper, I propose to examine this intermedial exchange in the works of Nilima Sheikh and Rajyashri Goody. Their juxtaposed incorporation of literary extracts within the textures of visuality renders insight into the aesthetic creative process driven by emotional affect. While Sheikh's medium is painting, Goody employs a range of mixed media including ceramics, photographs, cookbooks, paper pulp as well as poetic texts. Their integration of literary narratives and poetry within the visual landscape creates a 'textural' aesthetics. Sheikh's paintings and Goody's installations/print both receive from, and re-represent the literary material them within the body of their works, thereby creating an aesthetics of intermediality.

Examining the "textural" aesthetics and its antecedent relation to the aesthetics of the personal raise implications of a historicization of their respective politics (Sheikh engages with narratives of Kashmir, migration/displacement, and dowry deaths, while Goody engages with caste issues). The study uses Sara Ahmed's theory of emotional affect to propose that reading the textual aesthetic, evokes a feminist method of "doing" or "re-doing". This opens further enquiries into the possibilities of intermedial exchanges within the reading of art and literature specifically concerning emotional affect and its evocative implications for feminist methods of doing and its politics.

Keywords: intermedial aesthetics, contemporary women artists, feminist art, literary aesthetics, Indian feminist art

1.1. Literary extracts and a visual aesthetics of the personal: An introduction to Nilima Sheikh and Rajyashri Goody's art practice

Artist Nilima Sheikh's work spanning over three decades of art practice has covered themes of political displacement, its trauma, and has consistently engaged with the experience of women caused by public and/or domestic unrest. Sheikh conceives her figurations on a large scale over scroll-like canvas sheets. Many of the exhibitions, uses space to invite the spectator to engage with stories both visual and literal. Her recent works use soft pastel shades of earthy blues, greens, reds and yellows indicating a sense of calm. However, almost always, these sober colours hold evocative reflections of trauma and memory (Sheikh, *Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dreams*). Take for instance, the single scroll painting – *My Hometown* (2009), displayed at the *Woman is as Woman Does* show at CSMVS, Mumbai. There is a dominion of primary colours: a red figure raises his arms, head tilted to one side, his torso and feet are washed by a sea of blue¹. Below this, the scroll splits into a different panel altogether – this time dominated by an androgynous figure in green, clutching a ripped chest (Sheikh, *My Hometown*). The red, gold and black tongues of fire above the red coloured figure, dissuades a reading of poetry that reflects romantic sensibilities – this work is alive, burning, and conveys pain.

In another scroll I have chosen for the analysis of this essay – *Across, from Terrain: Carrying Across Leaving Behind* (2016–2017), soft hues of the pink of dawn and the reds of dusk, commune with bluish greys of mountains and seas. It narrates a journey from dawn to dusk, at first glance. However, the presence of mystical creatures stencilled in red and blue—into the terrain of the landscape, including serpents, winged creatures like the Chimera, demons, phoenix, monkey gods, and four-legged animals from the forest—indicate a search for the self within dream-like memories. In the centre of the painting, a white-bearded man in a long robe is captured by demon-like creatures (Sheikh, *Across*). One of them resembles Anubis, the Greek God of Death, insinuating death. Four different extracts from poems by Ocean Vuong, Lal Ded, Tahir Ghani and Mahmoud Darwish, on confluences of the self with roads, sky and earth intersperse the stencilled fauna, grey-blue mountains and rivers. Through the selected extracts of poetry and interspersed mythical creatures across world mythologies, Sheikh deconstructs the visual feeling of post-impressionist colours.

In Deeptha Achar's essay on the emergence of the Indian Woman Artist, she mentions that often, "lyricality" was used to denote the "feminine" nature of Sheikh's work. The implication, as explained by Achar, was that the "lyrical" nature of Sheikh's paintings suggested "the sensuous and sinuous" leading to a reductive notion that feminine "affect" dominates over "thought" (Achar 217). While this paper will examine evocative affect and the important relation it has with politics, especially of feminist method in artistic conceptualisation, I shall slightly deviate into Achar's own argument to demonstrate the evocation of the lyrical through intermedial modes. Achar suggests that instead of examining whether the "lyrical is feminine (or feminist)" (Achar 218), there might be an alternative method by which we harness the effect of a term like lyrical and analyse the methods of reading it proposes. She also adds that this might formulate an engagement that allows a feminist dimension to emerge. While Achar herself moves on to connect this analysis to an art historical analysis of Sheikh's work in context with the Indian Women's movement and allied concerns, it is my intent to fully engage with this question. I propose that within the texts I have chosen for this paper, the artists create a lyrical form of engaging with art and text by juxtaposing visual elements that use and are inspired by textual extracts in a corollary to the literary ekphrasis². The brief introductory analysis of Sheikh's paintings, has established that a spectatorial response of her paintings invite poetic readings. It is precisely the nature of flow (produced by her use of colour within the panels) and feeling (encapsulated within the personal and historical narratives of the painting and poetic excerpts) that creates the lyrical in her paintings.

In addition to Sheikh's work through the years, this paper will analyse similar concerns in the work of artist Rajyashri Goody's installation and mixed media practice. Goody, an artist of Dalit heritage, practices a mixed media practice that takes inspiration from seminal texts of Dalit literature. In her work, *Is the Water Chavdar?* Goody uses multiple mediums to engage critical reflections – the installation space is dictated by the narrative of the Mahad Satyagraha. The vast room is axially arranged around a pillar covered with the paper pulp of Manusmriti scripts³. The axis of the pillar is inaccessible to the viewer as they are surrounded by 10,000 palm-sized ceramic stupas, signifying the 10,000 undocumented persons of Dalit heritage who accompanied Dr. Ambedkar on the Mahad Satyagraha (Goody, *Is the Water Chavdar?*). The stupas reflect the earthy colours found in Sheikh's paintings. They range from deep browns and reds to watery blues, and light greenish greys. From an aerial view, they form whorls of human resistance against a solitary pillar. Their visual assemblage also evokes the liquid power of rivers of resistance. Thus, they use material symbols of community rebellion to subvert caste power.

Additionally, the walls surrounding the adjacent corners of the room display monotype inkjet prints of the artist, and others beside the Chavdar tank, a Stupa and statues of Ambedkar. The photograph has a quality of water – blotted at the edges, leaking imprints to represent the relationship of Dalit bodies in relation to thirst, access to water and daily resistance. By the right side of the entrance to the installation is a wooden shelf under the inkjet print of a man cupping water in his

palm, turning towards the camera, are the texts with the cover title – *Is the Water, Chavdar*? The booklet contains poems and excerpts from Dalit literature surrounding the need, thirst, taste and fight for water. They are by Vasant Moon, G Kalyan Rao, Namdheo Nimgade, Sharankumar Limbale, Urmila Pawar and Laxman Mane (Goody, *Is the Water Chavdar?*). The text and title critically reflect on the idea of “delicate” or “fragile” and its variant, “delicacy” of water and human thirst. It thwarts an attempt to subjugate a Dalit identity, by inserting texts of resistance, and photographs of a Dalit individual “touching” or “holding” water in his palms. The concept of delicacy is invoked repeatedly within the title that refers to “tasty” in Marathi, and in the literary texts that refer to acts of drinking waters.

Goody’s installation not only opens enquiries to the rhetoric of feeling, but incorporates this rhetoric through the navigation of the space. It works on the principle of denial and reception. As the spectator views each photograph, these stupas dictate the mobility of the spectator around the space. This experience of the installation leads a lyrical feeling of discomfiture. The effect of being hard to reach conveys the accountability one must hold for being part of a caste-entrenched tradition. The hard-to-reach-ness affects the spectator’s experience with the installation – people who were denied water engulf the axis of pulped Manusmriti, while water denied to them distorts the nature of a photograph. For any grounding, there are the small booklets of poems, the only source of written material within the installation (Vats 99).

Goody’s use of literary texts is a common theme employed across other works. In *Eat with Great Delight*, she displays photographs taken on point-click cameras by her family members, in which they are engaged in the act of eating. In this work as well, there are “recipe” booklets containing re-written extracts from famous Dalit literary texts, like *Joothan*, *Akkarmashi* and *The Branded*, etc. In *Ukadala* or *Picnic* the literary extract of Dalit dining experience is accompanied, (like in *Is the Water...*) by ceramic sculptures – but this time modelled in the form of bhakris (millet rotis) and other items which are part of the Dalit food cultures. The installation itself is inspired by extracts from Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmashi* and Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons we Broke*. Goody herself emphasises that the relationship of the Dalit individual to food cultures. She insists that they be consumed along with the textual material (Goody, *Recipes of Resilience*). The textual extracts from literature invoke personal and communal histories, even as they shape the form of installations – whether it be photographs, or ceramic sculptures and paper pulp. This indicates lyrical readings across multiple mediums.

1.1.1. Historical experience as formal interventions to intermedial elements of creation

It is worth noting that Sheikh’s mode of intermediality is completely different from Goody’s. Their primary substrates themselves vary – while Goody fashions the ceramics and paper pulp by hand, Sheikh’s substrate is the scroll canvas. Both of them bring in formalistic innovations to their chosen mediums – while Goody’s engagement with pulping the paper, creating a photo exhibition and arranging ceramic sculptures a certain way is symbolic of resistance, Sheikh’s works are symbolic of engagement – the large scroll canvases and their arrangement, invite a commune with histories read by experiencing pain. However, both of them modify space. In Goody’s *Is the Water Chavdar* for instance, there is an unreachability, while in Sheikh’s *Terrain*, the canvases are arranged to form a canopy and mimic the structure of a *shamiyana* – or a makeshift place of shelter.

Consequently, a common aspect to both their works is the engagement with histories. These are formed by personal confluences – Goody largely embodies Dalit subjectivity and works on an aesthetics of re-writing hegemonical archives, whereas Sheikh embodies subjectivity of loss, longing and recovery across political and feminist histories of displacement or violence and documents both real and surreal experiences. This returns us to the affective in their works, which are reflections of personal experiences of historical realities. Within their lyrical modes, it is the element of the personal that drives formalistic recreations of two kinds – trans-medial and pluri-medial. In Sheikh’s

painting and poetic juxtaposition the forms are trans-medial. Whereas in Goody's placement of mixed media (ceramic sculptures, watered photographs, pulped pillar and texts) and literary extracts in space, it is pluri-medial.⁵ (Ceciu 553).

However, the literary extracts in the visual space/medium does not solely perform the function of intertextuality or influence as Margarete Landwehr theorises in her paper (Landwehr 8)⁶. Its presence indicates a reading of text within visual space of engagement, not simply as an intertextual citation, but as a relation between different media, and its performance in the largely visual "textures" of installation. These incorporations within the substrate of visibility – whether large scale paintings in Sheikh's practice, or mixed media installations using sculpture and/ photography in Goody's practice is what this paper introduces as *textural aesthetics*. It is this formalistic intermedial invention that has political and historical connotations that I will refer to as "textural" aesthetics, henceforward.

1.2. Generative Affect through Lyrical Intermodalities

In the previous section we have seen how lyricality is created through a textural aesthetic that juxtaposes writing and visuals. In this section, textural aesthetic instances and affective implications of the same will be explored through an intermedial analysis which takes into consideration the semiotic, visual and literary nature of these created "text"ures.

In his essay, "What is this thing called Lyric?", Stephen Burt explores multiple definitions and articulations of the "lyric" as form, mode of poetry, and narrative. In each delineation, the relationship of expressing the personal through feelings, stand out within the lyric form (Burt 425). While it is straightforward to examine the meaning of the "lyric" with respect to written forms of art (literature), its use within visual art opens obvious possibilities for intermedial explorations. I would argue here, that the confluence of the personal and of emotional affect, its relation to music is precisely its transferability to painting; in colours, rhythm, tone and affect. In Achar's essay she refers to Sheikh's works as described as being "lyrical" and how it relates to a subversive ideologue of "feminine" paintings. Here, I would attempt to deconstruct the "lyricality" of this "textural aesthetics" and then move to feminist implications.

Consider Sheikh's panel, *Across from the Terrain...* series. The panel is narrating a tale of journeying – perhaps across borders, as seen from the stencilled images of mythological creatures, it appears to be a dream. The curatorial note for the painting series does not indicate the specific story that this panel illustrates. However, there are heavy implications to a Punjabi folktale which evokes an encounter of an old man, with the shapeshifting form of the Lord of Death (Steel 205). The focus of this paper takes one to the interaction between the premise of this story that appears like a dream, and the poetic extracts. All of these poems by Young, Darwish, Lal Ded and Tahir Ghani invoke images of an endless sky, and the "road (Sheikh, Across)". When the spectator reads them and journeys the cartography that Sheikh has illustrated through mountains and frontier terrains, there is a chilling emotion – one of desperate hope against existential torpor concerning the event of displacement or exile.

In Kumkum Sangari's research on Nilima Sheikh's practice pertaining to narratives of displacement, longing and transcultural divergences, she mentions that the embedding of text within the image can be indicative of "a feminist art practice that uses intertextuality to foreground the dispersal of authorship (Sangari 163)." This argument parallels the theory of performative citations – of repetitive invocations within art, which have gendered and deconstructive connotations as proposed by Susie Tharu on *Notes for Grammar of the Visual Vernacular* (Tharu 14–19). But in this paper, by foregrounding the implications of lyricality, I propose that the element of performative readings / rewritings in textural aesthetics has a specific function invoking affect – and in this, the performative method is not solely deconstructive⁷ as much as intentional towards a certain political reading – whether feminist, anti-caste or on the trauma of displacement. And it is precisely the

nature of *textural* aesthetics that makes this possible. Because, it is the examination of the “feeling” or a meditative approach to the evocations behind these politically present experiences that lead them here (Burt 423). While Sangari is right to mention the relation of intertextuality and multiple authorship, the “feminist” art practice is located not within intertextuality, but within intermediality and its implications of affect.

Reading Sheikh’s figuration in *Across* through the literary extracts demonstrates affective evocations. Ocean Vyoung’s poem, in the painting, ends in an absurd reassurance – “the end of the road / is so far ahead / it is already behind”. Darwish and Ghani’s poems indicate listlessness and pain from the lonely migratory journey – “Where should the birds fly after the last sky?” (Darwish, *Nilima Terrain*) and “Better/ that the worlds / turn upside down.” As a final word, Lal Ded’s voice is an echo of loss “breached and bridged / the day faded”. This range of evocations form an overture to the modality that Sheikh employs.

Textural aesthetics therefore use the lyrical mode to generate affect. Reading these works of art using semiotics provide multiple departures. One – the nature of narratives that are interwoven within the visual aesthetic. In Sheikh’s work one observes the use of history – political, literary and folkloric. Second – the reason or nature of questioning that these significations imply. Through the choice of certain poems and visuals, the spectator is invited to read a certain experience of displacement and migratory journeys through their own lens. The artist’s empathetic vision transfers to some of the readable indications. This builds a transactional intermediary relationship between the emotive affect that inspired the creative act, and that which the viewer engages with. In a sense, this then “mediates” affect through bodily interventions.

Let us return to instances of Goody’s *Is the Water Chavdar*, to observe this multimedial intervention invoking a different history – the experience of caste and drinking water. The installation itself pays homage to the Mahad Satyagraha in which tens of thousands of Dalit persons walked with Dr. B R Ambedkar to the Chavdar Tank in Maharashtra to defy the caste-based denial of drinking or collecting water from the pond. In the centre of this installation is an examination of the experience of thirst (Goody, *Is the Water Chavdar?*). In addition is a history that has not documented this experience, specifically those of the people who accompanied Babasaheb. All the poems in the booklet have instances of Dalit persons foraging for water, written in the form of Goody’s recipes. It functions almost as an instruction manual for experiences in asking for water – whether one is thirsty after a meal, bearing the summer heat, or a day’s work of playing drums, or even seeking water between everyday duties such as studying or cooking and cleaning (Goody, *Is the Water Chavdar?*). This is affective because three elements come together here – the bodily experience of thirst, its historical weight of experience from Dalit subjectivity and the emotional responses of being denied water, and relishing one’s thirst. All these “affect” the spectator. Affect thus implies cognition, emotion as well as bodily movement (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 206–07).

In Goody’s photo-prints, the expressions of different groups of people or individuals (including one of Goody herself) is either defiant, or proud and jubilant. The inkjet print – and its formalistic reiteration of wetness and leaking juxtapose the installation space and the poems (Goody, *Is the Water Chavdar?*). Lars Elleström in his work, “Photography and Intermediality”, would classify photography as art in terms of how it looks as opposed to photographs as documentation/ ethnographic in terms of its subject matter (Elleström 166). However, Goody’s formalistic usage of the inkjet prints, at once challenges and combines these operational binary definitions of what a photograph can “mean” (her photographs are both documentary/ethnographic as well as plays with aesthetic form and subjective representation). In the spectatorial engagement, affective and political connotations of “leaking” and “erasure” are dismantled through the Dalit experience with access to water. Inaccessibility is further emphasised by the pillar of pulped Manusmriti. This imprint carries another message – an invitation to Dalit persons to re-write their histories and rights to access and life. Thus, a lyrical mode of enquiry leads to the generation of affect through multiple modes which question and recreate aesthetic forms and their semiotic historical contexts.

1.3. Intermedial Interventions for Alternate Histories and Epistemological Ruptures

Several intermediality theories mention on the one hand – a synchronic study of intermedial relations in artworks (Petersson and Johansson 7) which investigates formalistic and symbolic relations between media in art and / literature. On the other hand, a diachronic departure investigates the history of these modalities and how media maintain or subvert social and cultural systems of power, or alternatively take part in forming “epistemological ruptures”. As seen in Goody and Sheikh’s works, intermediary methods of textural aesthetics use lyric and bodily mediations to engage with political and cultural histories – in assertion or reiteration. This paper veers towards these diachronic pursuits of analysis. In terms of “ruptures” within textural aesthetics – they not only form epistemological pursuits, but also engage with phenomenological experiences through the aspect of “affect” and the questions thereby raised towards these histories of experience. This expands the range of aesthetic rupture to question epistemologies through consciousness of experience – delivered through the cited literature.

Within this context of multiple mediums an interesting phenomenon arises – of tensions between the borders of subject of expression, mediums used and textual material. These tangible borders within the *textures* often contain and present the aforementioned ruptures (Petersson and Johansson 12). One instance of this direct use of media history and diachronic affect would be Goody’s installation, *Picnic*, which uses ceramic, a medium derived from soil or clay to narrate stories surrounding Dalit food culture and experience. Here the borders are not as layered as in *Is the Water...* It is simply an installation of several icons of food items including bhakkars, puri, laddoos, and grains, made of ceramic laid out in a large circle. Beside this, is an extract from Limbale’s *Akkarmashi* where he shares an experience of going on a school “picnic” or leisure-cum-education trip, and having to spend a meal with fellow classmates and teacher who come from other upper castes/ classes. The extract is presented once more in the recipe-poem format, re-written by Goody to form part of the installation (Goody, *Picnic*). The narrative describes moments of othering felt by the narrator as he is asked to sit under a different tree from the other students, and opens his lunch of “bhakari and chutney”, a more frugal preparation compared to the rich, “fried and tasty” food that the other children bring (Borah). There are also mentions of untouchability in sharing food, and the act of collecting “leftovers”. This latter act is invoked in another writer’s text, and Goody’s own work – pulping Manu to create the laddus mentioned in *Joothan*, by Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiographical novel with the same name (Borah).

The poem’s narrative uses “might” to refer to the possibilities of discrimination which will follow from the encounter. However, this “might” within the context of the artwork is reflective of resistance to these practices of erasure. There is always the spectre of violence within denying. And of obvious erasure – the one who is presented with “leftovers” is considered leftover themselves. But through the piece, there is a negation of this denial. Here, they are brutal reminders of survival – even if on leftovers, or food that does not comply with upper caste cultural hegemony. The arrangement of the ring, and a poem/recipe by the side employ two kinds of invitations simultaneously – one which invites the spectator to an experience of dining; secondly, reminding them of the lived experience of marginalisation through literature (Goody, *Picnic*).

The medium itself is ceramic and has associations with mud/soil – elements that are often used to marginalise the caste experience (Borah). However, here its usage signifies ultimate “resilience” in nature – soil evolves and survives against all odds. This material history becomes a commentary against othering, and serves as an anti-archive in that sense. Further, through the presence of “inedible” ceramic food, the borders of engagement force an element of inaccessibility upon the spectator (Goody, *Picnic*). Ultimately it confronts and reminds the spectator on the cultural hierarchies of caste within acts of eating, sharing food and dining together in the Indian socio-cultural nexus.

In Sheikh’s *My Hometown* the stencilled text in gold, within the middle section of the painting dictates the reading of the figuration. It narrates the gesture of raising one’s arms in surrender within

a strife torn land, in the event of the artist's friend's mother's death and subsequent funeral procession (Sheikh, *My Hometown*). Several symbols echo the emotions of loss, and communal hand holding within political turbulence. In the topmost panel, there are flames in red and black against the silhouette of homes. A subtle gold shade echoes within the stencilled words. In this manner, Sheikh weaves a continuity of narrative across borders between text and visuals. The painting as a whole is a commentary on the personal pains suffered by individuals within strife-torn areas. A metaphor for this loss and longing for peace is personified in the figure on the bottom part of the scroll. It is a re-visitation of the figure of Hanuman, with a rip in his chest (Sheikh, *My Hometown*). This figure, is coloured in green, an androgynous creature, pulling apart their fabric across the chest to reveal cartographic roadmaps among hills and valleys. Two fingers point within this wound in the heart, and the reader cannot miss echoes to the figure of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which reflects also within the tilted head (Sheikh, *My Hometown*).

As in *Across*, Sheikh weaves a world of intertextual and cross-border confluences between creatures of myth, narratives of religious belief, and symbolic echoes of fire, burning and landscapes. The textual material inserts the language of emotion in the most pertinent manner, such that, while the visuals invoke citations from art history and political history, the text creates a point of convergence for the investigation of an event and its related affect – the experience of the artist's friend in his attempt to provide a funeral for his mother within a politically monitored space in Kashmir. This locus points travels across political borders and histories of dissonance to pore over an experience that is human – whether dream, wish, story or painful reality. Most relevantly, this human experience within the textual narrative holds the figurations and builds a narrative across both political and visual borders in between media. *Textural* aesthetics imbues this nature of cross-border interaction and becomes the impetus for both epistemological⁸ and phenomenological⁹ rupture.

1.3.1. Towards an avant-garde art practice

In Geeta Kapur's essay, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos an Indian / Asian Avant-garde", she argues that a decolonised Avant-garde is dissenting, presents a disjuncture, and problematizes the issues of democracy/nation, as well as is naturally radical in subversion (Kapur, *Dismantled Norms* 411). We have seen through the historical situatedness of the select texts, that they engage in radical subversions of social hierarchies through formalistic departures and thereby foreground experiences of rupture. Kapur would explain that a "dismantled" movement within art would destroy and, in that process, recreate art forms (Kapur, *Dismantled Norms* 373). In Goody's pulping of paper, and reiteration of stories of discrimination, she reinvents an art form of resistance and memory. Kapur accordingly proposes that a critical art practice, indicative of an "avant-garde" is possible only through an interrogative mode, which "bends the claim of radicality in favour of reflection through a subverting aesthetic, through formal innovation and a conceptual re-coding of "artistic" materials (Kapur, *Cultural Conjecture* 54)". In Sheikh and Goody's textural aesthetics, we have seen a discourse of reflective interrogations – often of specific emotions within human experience, narrated through a lyrical, intermedial process.

In Kapur's theoretical terms this study can confirm that the selected texts are "Avant-garde". However, an investigation of the basic definition of "avant-garde" reveals its implication as first of its kind, a sort of forefront (or vanguard) in resistance, and movement. This implies that an avant-garde work is not solely reflective as much as "actionable". When Kapur says "conceptual re-coding of artistic materials" it is redundant, because the artist does not in these cases approach the material in order to re-code or reconceptualise them. Rather, it is an internalised narrative of human experience that shapes a certain quality or form inherent in the artistic material (previously unnoticed as dominant ideologies have framed these materials). Additionally, it is through bodily mediated affect that this occurs. In effect, in the lyrical mediations offered by an exploration of affect, the artist confronts and interrogates new modalities. This encounter with textural art, is mediated by two

bodies in communication. Firstly, the interrogation of new modes is mediated by the artist's body during the act of creation. In turn, during the act of reception, they are experienced (beheld and further introspected upon) by the spectator's body. I shall attempt to demonstrate this occurrence through Sheikh's evolving Champa series.

When Champa Grew Up and *Re-visiting Champa*, offer two timelines of engagement with violence against women within the Indian socio-cultural context. In her address at the "Cadences of Resistance" panel held at CSMVS, Mumbai, she described an event that led to the creation of Champa – the news of the death of a young woman named Champa, within her neighbourhood, on account of dowry related harassment and violence. She describes that although the social movements were rife with protests against the dowry deaths, as an artist, she felt inadequate to represent this affliction of women from classes and castes not in alignment with her own. However, when the young girl that everyone in the neighbourhood saw growing up, died under the same circumstances, the resulting affliction inspired a rage in the artist, inspiring her to wield the brush and create figurations that go beyond the event of death (Sheikh, Cadences of Resistance). Sheikh's panels on the first Champa series contain figurations of her bodily experiences of the innocence growing up, and the pains of leaving one's maternal home, only to face violence and harassment (Sheikh, *When Champa Grew Up*) in her marital home. There are two aspects to note here – one, of personal affect driving a narrative of painting; two – of the continuation of this feminist dialogue two decades since the first series. In both, there are supporting verbal additions. The first used anti-dowry songs of resistance to accompany the painting. In the second, Nilima's words reappear. They are more frugal this time – a single poem accompanies the first panel; thereafter, single words or phrases, sometimes in Hindi script, are hidden within the spectres of Champas after (Sheikh, *Revisiting Champa*).

In one of the panels in *Revisiting Champa* she names the incidents where atrocities (often of rape and caste-based murder) against women have rocked the geopolitics of this modern nation – Hathras, Unnao, Nirbhaya and others. The motifs of burning fires, and shrouded bodies in the colour of diluted blood are reminders of their horror and a larger question of the position and experience of womanhood within a patriarchal and casteist society (Sheikh, *Revisiting Champa*). These borders between visuals or between text, visuals and reality of the spectator are not as sharp as in other series (Sheikh, *Revisiting Champa*). They permeate the feeling of terror and grief within the spectator, as it does in relation to the timelines of the 1970s to the 20s of the new millennia in this "independent" nation. The mode of the *texture* is a vehicle to express this horror and a call for action, in the interrogation of how much we may have grown as a nation in terms of upholding the rights of a woman, inclusive of her different experiences across caste, class and religious or tribal ethnicity.

Just as many of Goody's works implicate the spectator in the practice of caste within the Indian society, Sheikh's Champa series implicate patriarchal elements within society irrespective of gender. Kumkum Sangari's excerpt on patriarchy being a systemic structure that "divide" women within the socio-cultural spaces of interaction is one such indication, that rests beside the *Revisiting Champa* series (Sheikh, *Revisiting Champa*). Sheikh's figuration contains one such textual element embedded within the revisited painting, of the panel in which the new bride finds herself surrounded by in-laws who are party to the dowry-related harassment. The word reads as "*andhesha*" in the Hindi script. Translated it means an evil omen or an indication/ guess that something untoward might occur. To the reader, it is a symbol of scheming as we are aware of the events to follow. Its real importance lies in the fact that a single word ties together several ideas – of patriarchy and its effect on women within the marital social structures, and to the larger commentary on women fighting against these almost invisible schemes.

Besides this, the pale red coloured word *andhesha* is a self-referential textual element – a verbal indicator of the visual indication of evil omen. This implies the visual function (albeit indexical) of the textual element, within the painting¹⁰. It questions how we read text within pictures – as a visual experience through an interplay of meanings. Even though this implies a deconstructive method, it

is not the interplay of meanings that is of importance. It is the intended relations between word and visuals reasoned by the spectator, that inevitably serve a deconstructive function. In other words, deconstruction or dismantling is a by-product of the process of the affective interrogation on both the part of the artist and the spectator. “Deconstruction” itself is not the intent that produces affect. This line of enquiry centres intermedial engagements and changes the focus involved in deconstructive theories of avant-garde art. This is possible precisely, because we have approached a lyrical and affective enquiry into the study of *textural aesthetics*¹¹.

1.3.2. A Return to Affect and Feminist Practice

Accordingly, while these tangible borders of intermediary aesthetics and formal re-coding questions the larger issues afflicting the democracy/nation and presents the disjuncture of reality and experience, it does so through the evocation of “affect”, and precisely through an attempt to understand how the spectator (and prior to this, the artists) may feel about these incidents.

Goody’s *Eat With Great Delight*, is a work motivated by her experiences of being from Dalit heritage and celebrating images which relate to rituals of eating. Inspired by the lacunae of visuals that celebrate Dalit bodies and acts of eating, celebration, joy and family, Goody decided to put this exhibition together from personal family photograph archives (Punyashloka 241). The recipe/poem calls people to rituals of enjoying food – be it of leftovers from barats (wedding ceremonies), of sleeping with a full belly even if they are cactus pods, enjoying ice-cream and biriyani (shared by an inter-faith lover albeit of upper caste), or even feeding children cornflakes. What these recipes share is the call to celebrate food practices, despite their lack of abundance or inaccessibility. This celebration is inclusive of Dalit food practices – surrounding rituals of Joothan or foraging to satisfy hunger, but is in no means limited by these experiences (Goody, *Eat with Great Delight*). Buying “foreign” food like cornflakes, or eating ice-cream, and corresponding photographs of the artist’s mother at her wedding smiling as she holds a glass of orange-coloured Mango juice, as well as photographs of birthday cakes and celebrations, are as Rahee Punyashloka states, a “counter-archive” of Dalit presence in Indian photography. Here, textual references decentre assumptions of Dalit identities to food cultures, that limit them to certain items of food (very often, beef meat), or of experiences of imploration and hunger (Punyashloka 242).

Punyashloka in his essay identifies four ways in which Goody’s work becomes a counter archive – one, it re-writes and inserts itself into a Brahmanical archive and its token representation of the suffering, hungry Dalit; two, it challenges assumptions that the Dalit relation to food is one of penury and lack or even denial; three, it embodies celebratory gestures and emotions by the Dalit identity in relation to food, thereby deconstructing stereotypical and reductive gazes upon the Dalit identity (Punyashloka 244). The very title of the project is derived from Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* where he mentions, “Eat the “leftovers” or Joothan with “relish”” (Valmiki). In essence, Goody’s artistic practice is born of an affective reflection and in its creation, there is the presence of the body in mediation.

If in *Picnic* Goody creates a statement of resistance against experiences of hunger and untouchability, in *Eat With...* she celebrates and expands this archive of alternate history of Dalit food cultures. Photography and recipe booklets have made a return here. In foregrounding pictures sourced from personal photo albums, and accompanying them with recipe/poems from Dalit literature, there is a sharp focus on emotions of joy, comfort with family and community, and moments of celebrations. The photographs range from various commonplace home memories – of her mother laughing, watching over the baby Goody as they sit in the kitchen before freshly cooked meals; of various family members feeding each other cake; of children posing before plucked fruit in the field. Also comparing with extracts such as “watch her swig the tea/ that has touched / your mouth. Pleasure/ might tingle through our body / all day.” We see this intentional engagement with the affect of bodily elation. In this sense, Goody’s work is a corollary to Sheikh’s revisitation of the *Champa* series. However, in both, it is a pre-occupation of a certain experience or feeling that induces the creative effort.

If textural aesthetic is fulfilling lyrical engagement through the nature of interrogative affect across differences of affective experience, it now becomes a necessary endeavour to examine its political nature in the theoretical sense. As seen from prior analysis, the “interrogative affect” is produced by the meditation of the artist upon an emotion (feeling) inspired by historical events. In Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, she traces the emergence of the affective turn as a response to feminist approaches to the body and queer approaches to emotion (Ahmed, Afterword: Emotions and their Objects 206). Within our context, it begets a similar question that Ahmed asks in the text – an investigation of “what emotions do? (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 4).” This question, through the textural material implies the bodily mediations involved in its creation and its reception. This confluence of bodily mediations and emotional affect indicates a feminist framework, primarily as Ahmed and others have pointed out – a questioning of the mind-body dualism (Ahmed, Afterword: Emotions and their Objects 206). This is then the response to the initial question we departed from – the extent to which the “lyrical” is considered “feminine” (Achar 217). From the associations that the “lyrical” has to meditative feelings and perception, they are branded “feminine” precisely because under a Cartesian dualist¹² framework, this understanding of “lyrical” cannot reconcile bodily and mental concerns. From the artist’s responses in relation to political histories as a source of inspiration and material, we realise that the lyrical is indeed political, and often covers feminist themes as well. Ahmed provides cues on how bodies are moved by affect and serve a deeply cultural and political function. Considering these affective turns in visual art/ literature “feminine” is reductive in the sense that both these artists, are embarking on a new aesthetic conceptualisation by using literary text as one of the mediums of visual material.

1.4. Conclusions: Departures for Textural Aesthetics and Feminist Ways of Doing

It is important to note that although our question began with the interrogation of whether Nilima’s paintings were “lyrical”, and therefore “feminine”, this study has led to the thesis that the question in itself is wrongly phrased. A more meaningful examination as shown is to observe the nature of “lyrical” through intermediary poetics and its obvious implications of its contextual history within Indian socio-political events. We may conclude here that it is the particular trait of *textural* aesthetics, to incorporate a lyrical form, firstly by the obvious presence of poetic forms that are reflexive and interrogate certain emotions, secondly through the intermedial possibilities between text and visuals – whether in the form of sculpture, photography, painting or its spatial experience. And this as we have seen, form a wide range – experiences of political migration and displacement, of dowry deaths and gender-based violence, of a deeply personal experience of “mourning” and the trauma of war and strife in Nilima’s work. Besides this, there are questions of human relations to water, thirst, cultural food practices, and the larger commentary on anti-caste resistivity and counter-archives within Goody’s works. The major proposal through this paper is that of the nature of *textural* aesthetics as a way of reading literary text as visual material; its lyrical implications and subsequent evocations of affect.

Sara Ahmed’s theories on feminist implications within affective studies furthers the scope of this study. In essence, textural aesthetics, in questioning human experiences of feeling, invite spectators to engage within the same, and create a relational orientation between literary text and visual substrate. Although the works selected for this analysis don’t centre the “feminist” theme in all the pieces, except perhaps Nilima’s *Champa* series and Goody’s *Eat with Great Delight* (which foregrounds the maternal/feminine presence within food cultures); the perspective here is to examine a “feminist” way of “doing” as an artist when using intermedial poetics within textural aesthetics. Its importance lies in the fact that these intermediary modalities of visual art and poetry are evidences of what Ahmed proposes, “emotive affect can “do”, or invite the body into actions, that serve certain intentionality. This opens the forum for questions regarding a feminist way of doing, that centres emotive affect and subsequent bodily mediations. While this exploration finds traces within this paper, it proposes

larger-scale potential for application across a wider range of texts (perhaps even by male artists), the scope of which is beyond the central questions of this paper.

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Notes

¹ This is where Sheikh chooses to place the bold, stencilled writing in gold, but the use of the literary will be explored in the later section of the paper.

² Ekphrasis: word of Greek origin, meaning a detailed literary description of a work of visual art.

³ This work itself, is a displacement of Goody's larger project *Manu* in which the pulping of this caste-enabling text demonstrates a pulverisation of the old hegemony towards the re-writing of new revolutionary futures.

⁴ *Chavdar: tasty, in Marathi*

⁵ Ramona L Céciliu delineates different kinds of intermedial poetics in literature and art. She defines "trans-medial" as the "the *transfer* of motifs/story and formal elements from one medium (art) to another" and of "multimedial" or "plurimedial" as "the *combination* of various media" within a work of art.

⁶ Although Landwehr recognises the presence of multiple mediums, ultimately, she draws conclusions based on assumptions of texts, their interrelations, drawing from Genette's conception of transtextuality and "hyperesthetics". This is perhaps because she focalises the influence of visual art on literature, and not vice versa (Landwehr 11). While this paper acknowledges the inception of intermediality studies from intertextual theorisations by Kristeva and Bakhtin before her, I would argue that it is the comparative method that allows for these alternate approaches.

⁷ When I say, not solely deconstructive, it is a certain idea of "deconstruction" that I question. Often in art and literature, deconstruction is used to question the inherent meaninglessness or excess of meaning present in a traditional or structural arrangement of language, expression or formalistic art. While here, the intention is to unearth the possibilities through a dismantling, when historical intention drives a deconstructive approach, there is another aspect at play. It is no longer solely a tool to unravel the failings of the traditional structures of art and language, precisely because this formalistic structure was invented or established by a hegemonical cultural institution / ideology. And it is precisely because of the "relation" it draws between one media (text) and the other (visual / spatial – photograph, sculpture, painting) and its historical or political intention that the deconstruction or rather, dismantling of form/structure occurs.

⁸ Epistemological in terms of the political history, memory and art historical citations inherent in Sheikh's figurations.

⁹ Phenomenological in terms of the conscious experience of the painting and its generation of affect within the spectator.

¹⁰ Derived from Charles Sanders Pierce's triadic model of the sign: icons, indexes and symbols. Although words are symbolic signs, I refer to them here as indexical precisely because they not only serve a verbal, but also visual function in the painting.

¹¹ Also, in terms of lyricality, being a "mediation/ meditation" to understand what one "feels", and therefore their exercises in textural poetics uses a form that controls the spectator's engagement – both corporeally and affectively.

¹² Cartesian dualism essentially presupposes the separate functionalities of the entities of mind and the body. An extensive mapping of this dichotomy led towards binary understandings of culture versus nature, and further,

masculine versus feminine and even public versus private. This developed as patriarchal social hegemonies. Butler draws attention to this in *Gender Trouble* (197). Sara Ahmed, points out that these binaries of mind versus body also influence affect theories, in order to conceptualise “affect” solely in terms of the thought or mental domain (208). Within such discourses, the bodily implications of “affect” as a felt experience is ignored or erased. By drawing the affective nature of lyricality, this paper also attempts to address the feminist turn to affect studies.

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From Repetitive Structures to Loops in Contemporary Sound Poetry^{*}

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Abstract: In this paper I investigate the compositional use of loops and audio technologies in contemporary sound poetry. I suggest a definition of ‘loop’ in this context and provide an overview of theory concerning repetition and loops in literary studies. Exploring the aesthetics of loops through a survey of contemporary sound-poetic practices, I show how loops influence sound and musicality as well as the textual level and semantics. Loops not least associate a work with various aspects of meaning, up to tautological accordance of form and content. They therefore qualify as a self-evident, independent compositional feature that can make words ‘dance’.

Keywords: Repetition, loop, sound poetry, phantom words, technology

Introduction

Repetition interweaves with nearly all areas of our life (Csúri/Jakob 2015, 8) and can therefore be considered a universal principle accountable for movement and rest, for change and perpetuation, difference and identity alike (cf. Mathy 1998, 7). Loops, an extreme form of repetition, have an ambiguous effect on our cognition, oscillating between stasis and movement, apathy and hypnotic excitement, and turning the time-axis from a linear into a cyclical structure. “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but in the mind that contemplates it.” (Deleuze referring to David Hume, cf. Deleuze 2001 [1968], 70). In the context of the arts, especially in poetry and music¹, repetitive structures play an utmost important role and can be considered a key element. Adjacent artforms like experimental film or performance-art also make use of blatant repetitions (concerning performance-art, cf. Benthien 2017). In addition to that, serial procedures may also be an indicator for challenging the concepts of originality and artistic creativity.

Conventional poetry already makes use of repetitions in various forms; a rhyme for example as a repetition of similar sounds. When repetition becomes the main structural aspect of composition it influences the work as a whole, foregrounding the repetitive structure – especially in the case of loops – as a self-evident feature. Examples of explicit repetitions in poetry can be found throughout history: litanies or magical spells that use repetition to strengthen invocation (for their alleged ability to evoke physical or psychological reactions; cf. Baumbach 2015, 49), poems of different epochs that draw on wordplay (like the 15th *Kühlpsalm* by Quirinius Kuhlmann, late 17th century, cf. Jacob 2015, 61–63, 70–72) and later examples in modernist and concrete poetry where words² or sections of a verse or a stanza repeat throughout a poem, in works by Velimir Chlebnikov, Inger Christensen, Friederike Mayröcker, Robert Lax, amongst others.³ But poems that use repetitions – or lists⁴ and enumerations – as a feature among others have to be distinguished from what I define as loops in sound poetry, because I define loops as iterating identical elements for seemingly innumerable cycles.

Loops were also important in the early stage of ‘musique concrète’⁵ and are crucial features in the repetitive branch of ‘minimal music’.⁶ Works ascribed to the latter genre that deploy tape loops (e.g. Pauline Oliveros’ *Bye Bye Butterfly* [1967] or Terry Riley’s (*Music for the Gift* [1964] and *Reed Streams* [1965])) presumably inspired experimental poets like Allen Fisher, who recorded and pro-

duced *The Art of Flight* (1974–76) at the studios of the Industrial music collective Throbbing Gristle⁷, or Clark Coolidge, who realized *Dews* (1969) at Mills College Tape Music Center⁸, both deploying multi-channel technology and loop structures. The electro-acoustic poetry of Fisher and Coolidge are furthermore examples of how poets utilize studio technologies to redefine poetic performance and composition (cf. Montgomery 2015, 137–138). In the field of experimental music, a more recent work has also been inspired by minimal music and deliberately deploys and compositionally exploits the analog medium of tape loops: *Disintegration Loops* by William Basinski is based on field recordings as material and uses the specifics of the magnetic tape medium by including the hisses and cracks that emerge during long-duration and iterant playback (because of the loop-structure), also causing a deterioration and eventually a ‘disintegration’ of the sound information stored on the magnetic tape.

Sound poetry, an experimental avantgarde genre of poetry open to (electronic and digital) media-technological treatments⁹, emphasizes the sound shape of spoken language as one of its main features, turning speech into music – even more than conventional poetry – and combining “the exactness of literature and the time manipulation of music” (Hanson 1982, 16). Without promoting techno-determinism, my aim here is to show how the compositional use of media-technologies influences the aesthetics of sound poetry. Because sound poetry has an “ongoing relationship” with repetitions and loops (Ellison 2020, 50) they can be considered prime structural elements to create rhythm and highlight speech melody by iterating identical sections. Due to this, loops in sound poetry can create what could be defined as ‘speech-music’.¹⁰

Repetitions and especially loops are moreover influencing the semantic level due to their ability to emphasize but also to erode meaning, including effects of pareidolia or apophenia, a disposition to perceive meaningful patterns or connections between unrelated things, in this case sounds. Because “[t]he musical sound of poetic speech is a means of transmitting information, that is, transmitting content”, loops as a form of utmost increased poetic musicality bear significance in itself, foregrounding its form as a self-evident sign and turning a phenomenon of structure into a phenomenon of meaning (Lotman 1977 [1971], 120).

The material of a loop can be spoken live by the author(s) or other human or synthetic (computer) voices and immediately captured by a loop-machine or effect pedal (utilized by artists such as LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Jörg Piringer, AGF, and others) or recorded and post-produced in a sound studio or any other location. It is also possible to ‘sample’ found material – pre-recorded and pre-mediated samples from internet, TV, radio, CDs, records etc. comparable to ‘found footage’ in film – which adds an additional layer of association to an external origin, a specific context, or to the person the sampled voice belongs to.

Theories of repetition and loops

Repetition has been defined as a main structural feature of artistic texts, especially phonological repetitions having a high value in the poetical structure, indicating that a repetitive structure of sounds bears significance in itself. A phenomenon of structure in artistic texts eventually proves as a phenomenon of meaning, establishing poetic meaning through a specific form (cf. Lotman 1977 [1971], 104–136). If highly repetitive structures are converted into an artistic principle they produce the opposite effect to automatization, therefore de-automatizing language (cf. Hansen-Löve 2006, 46).

Because of the general relevance of repetitive structures, several studies in literature and poetry exist, many dating from recent years (Csúri/Jacob 2015; Mathey 2015; Lüdeke/Mülder Bach 2006; Hilmes/Mathy 1998; Rimmon-Kenan 1980). Some have acknowledged the relevance of repetition as a central device of artistic and poetic composition (cf. Lobsien 1995, 29) but only few explicitly mention the term ‘loop’ (relating to the work of Gertrude Stein, cf. Delville 2013), defining loops loosely as repetitions of certain segments of a poem (Rakusa 2016) or using the term in a rather metaphorical sense (Eco 1994 [1990], 83–100). In a (yet unpublished) paper from the field of

musicology, Dean Suzuki examines “origins and practices of minimalist processes” in sound poetry focusing on repetitive structures, loops, and permutations (in works by Brion Gysin and Charles Amirkhanian), concluding that “minimalism and the unfolding process are among the most influential and profound styles, techniques and aesthetics” of some sound poetic works. (Suzuki 2015). While Suzuki concentrates on only two sound poets in relation to ‘minimalist’ aesthetics I provide a wider overview of several artistic examples and various approaches as well as a definition of sound poetic loops. A seminal and extensive study on sound poetry discusses loops in a short excursus only (cf. Lentz 2000, 598–599), citing a study on experimental radio play that contains a sub-chapter on loops (cf. Maurach 1995, 194–197). A more recent study on sound poetry in the 21st century briefly mentions repetitions as a compositional method in relation to redundancies and that the repetitiveness of a loop necessarily leads to a loss of meaning (cf. Nuno 2019, 21 and 239). In a sub-chapter about ‘repetition’ in a book about ‘sonic phantoms’, Barbara Ellison looks closer into the methods and effects of repetitive structures and loops in experimental music, sound art and sound poetry, also mentioning psycho-acoustic effects such as apophenia in the perception of speech-loops (Ellison 2020, 45–55). Providing a history of loops and its aesthetics, mainly in the field of (popular) music but also discussing a few examples of speech-loops, a monograph by Tilmann Baumgärtel argues for a loop’s dependency on the cyclical repetition of *identical* material, as well as a loop’s ability to turn “ennui into transcendence” – aspects that I will make productive in this article (Baumgärtel 2016, 22).

Exhaustive repetitions and loops can also be described as tautological, overturning a perceived pattern and emerging into a variation of the repeated, thus subverting the concept of identity (cf. Cheie 2015, 403). In the identical, tautological iterations of (speech-) loops, the differences occur in the perception of the listener, with a potential – if listened to long enough – to create phenomena of apophenia and ‘phantom words’ (cf. Ellison 2020, 45–55; Deutsch 2019). This resonates with what has been written in relation to Gertrude Stein’s use of repetitions, that the loop “creates a self-generating dynamic that strives for a constant renewal and actualization of text and sound” (Delville 2013, 78).

Arguing for repetition to not only bear self-generating power but also to be a self-containing entity, Gilles Deleuze proposes a critique of representation by arguing that repetition has a value in itself: “when the modern work of art develops its permutating series and its circular structures, it indicates to philosophy a path leading to the abandonment of representation. [...] The totality of circles and series is [...] a formless *ungrounded* chaos which has no law other than its own repetition” (Deleuze 2001, 68–69). Deleuze also depicts an “ontological repetition” (Deleuze 2001, 293), emphasizing the principle of a self-sufficient repetition, which has been described as a “semiotic negativity” (Lobsien 1995, 226). “In a certain sense, the ultimate repetition, the ultimate theatre, therefore encompasses everything; while in another sense it destroys everything; and in yet another sense selects among everything.” (Deleuze 2001, 293). This can be applied to the concept of a loop as a tautological entity. The destruction “of everything” can be linked to the concept of ‘semantic satiation’ (cf. Jakobovits 1966) that can occur in speech-loops, emptying the semantic content and foregrounding the loop itself. The signifier counts more than the signified, the gesture of ‘again’ and ‘evermore’, until what is spoken exhausts itself (cf. Rakusa 2016, 9). Loops can therefore be classified as a disruption (cf. Jäger 2010; Bolter/Grusin 2000) that makes the materiality and structure of language perceivable and allowing to semanticize the sign itself.

Defining the late 20th century, a period of “postmodernism aesthetics”, as the “era of repetition [...] when iteration and repetition seem to dominate the whole world of artistic creativity”, Umberto Eco proposes a definition of “to repeat”, as making “a replica of the same abstract type” (Eco 1994 [1990], 84, 86, 85), which resonates with the definition of a loop as repetition of an identical element.

Definition of Loops in Sound Poetry and its Cognitive and Aesthetic Effects

To distinguish loops as a distinct feature in sound poetry from mere repetitions and to work out its specific aspects, modes of composition as well as aesthetic and cognitive effects, I will hereby propose

a definition. It depends on the examination of artistic examples as well as on research mainly from the fields of literary studies and musicology.

A loop in sound poetry can be considered a distinct form of repetitive structure that repeats short and identical aural text fragments (or speech-sounds) for a seemingly innumerable duration. The brevity of the iterative cycles is crucial to constitute a loop: if the repeated selection is too long, the perception of a mere repetition might occur, but not the notoriously pulsating rhythmicity of a loop, which has the aesthetic ability to emerge into a musical ‘beat’ that consolidates the overall structure. Thereby the emphasis shifts from the repeated material to the loop structure itself. A loop, or ‘non-classical’ repetition (cf. Lobsien 1995, 224), as an independent and self-contained aesthetic feature that, in reception, oscillates between boredom and mesmerizing ban, stasis and movement: the loop as an ambiguous structure turning ennui into transcendence (cf. Baumgärtel 2016, 22). Loops bear an aesthetic value which relies on repetition as a signifying element, creating meaning through its distinct form and not on hermeneutic mediation of its content, oscillating between cumulation and emptying of meaning.¹¹

The challenge of loops is to elicit something new out of a repetition, to obtain a “difference” in “repetition” (cf. Deleuze 1994 [1968]). This can result in a paradoxical state of perception in which the repetition of short segments of speech (single words or phrases) “call[s] upon the mind’s natural inclination towards ‘order-seeking’ in order to produce [...] disorienting effects” (Ellison 2020, 51). This ‘order-seeking’ also intensifies the musical aspect of speech-loops because it pushes the ear to the nearest tonal interval, foregrounding the tonal and micro-tonal aspects of speech by means of repetition (cf. Scott Johnson cited in Suzuki 2018, unpaginated). The aesthetic and cognitive effects of looping can therefore lead to highly diverse states such as regularity and order, hypnotic mesmerizing, as well as unnerving impatience and chaotic disorientation. Identical repetition not only realizes a rationally accessible order but also bears an irrational component.

It needs to be pointed out that although orally uttered repetitions that do not mechanically iterate identical material can assume the character of a loop, primarily if a given selection is repeated long enough in utmost resemblance, it may still feature slight but perceivable variations in each cycle.¹² The difference lies in the precision and identity of mechanically generated loops: by deploying audio-technologies, human limitations can be bypassed, such as the inability to repeat without variations or aberrations. This supports, as an aesthetic effect, the sameness of the iterations resulting in a higher grade of tautology (cf. Cheie 2015, 403) and redundancy, inducing an ambiguity of stasis and motion.

This ambiguity can hold sense and meaning in suspension and even multiply it, resulting in apophenia effects and ‘phantom words’ that are not actually spoken but perceived in the listener’s perception when listened to over a longer period of time.¹³ The psychological effect of ‘phantom words’ can be exploited in a poetical context by deploying tight repetitions and loops to provoke the appearance of – however subjective and indeterminant – words and phrases in perception only, creating poetry with deliberately unforeseen content. This constitutes a highly exceptional and also challenging aspect of speech-loops: not only the interpretation of a text is open, but also the very production due to a loop’s ability to generate ‘phantom’ texts in the listener’s cognition is unpredictable! Apophenia effects and ‘phantom words’ are examined by Barbara Ellison in her work as a researcher and composer. Ellison’s compositions *Cybersongs* (2021) feature “hypnotic textures of vocal utterances through the intensive and extensive use of repetition”¹⁴; some pieces (like *Wanseets kussa*) exclusively consist of densely looped words uttered by a synthetic voice, resembling the word-loops that psychologist Diana Deutsch used for her psychoacoustic experiments. Referring to Ellison’s series of compositions that also concentrate on loops, *Vocal Phantoms*, she points out that they oscillate between the “‘semantization’ of sonic elements that were initially meaningless and would remain so in the absence of repetition—a clear example of apophenia”, and the opposite effect of the “dissipation of meaning by ‘semantic satiation’” (Ellison 2020, 46). Ellison’s compositions are therefore

examples for the ambiguity of loops and their ability to erode meaning and at the same time generate apophenia-effects like ‘phantom words’.

At last, the distinction between the ‘speech mode’ and the ‘nonspeech mode’ of listening is also of importance. Reuven Tsur argues that a cognitive difference exists of how a listener perceives sounds, noises, or music and the perception of speech in which acoustic signals are excluded and only an abstract phonetic category is perceived and decoded. But Tsur proposes a third “‘poetic mode’ of speech perception in which some precategorical sensory information is subliminally perceived”, being “the source of the ‘mysterious’ intuitions concerning speech sounds” (Tsur 1992, viii). Speech-loops may even reinforce this ‘poetic mode’ because of their rigid rhythmical structure – an additional expressive pattern, inducing monotony as well as reappearance and steadiness – and because the perception constantly shifts between a loop’s sound and textual qualities, even more than in other poetic forms. I would therefore argue that loops in (sound) poetry are an outstanding example for this ‘poetic mode’ because the nonemotional (linguistically referential) use of speech sounds and the emotional (linguistically nonreferential) use converge in an intensified manner, with the highly repetitive structure being an additional, self-evident feature that raises the poetic function of language, the self-reference and “palpability of signs” (Jakobson 1960, 356).

Non-technological repetitions

Loops can be generated by a wide variety of technological devices, analog and digital alike. In the analog era mainly by banding together magnetic tape to create a circular, coiled structure that repeats the same snippet over and over again. Also, vinyl discs are able to create loops by forcing the needle to skip back one cycle of a groove or by using a closed groove (although limited to a duration between approximately one and two seconds). In some cases of looping that do not make compositional use of media technologies I would consider excessive repetitive structures to be influenced by the knowledge of media and sound technologies – or in earlier times by imagining or foreseeing such technologies (e.g. the simultaneous poems by dada artists). With nowadays’ digital technologies, a loop can be produced quite easy and effortless with an audio-software’s loop function, a digital loop-machine or effect pedal.

Already in the early stage of sound poetry (e.g. *Sonate in Urlauten* composed 1922 to 1932 by Kurt Schwitters) non-technological repetitions were deployed as a striking feature that increased musicality. In literature and poetry not considered sound poetry, short and stupendous repetitions can also be found. Gertrude Stein deployed repetitive structures throughout *The Making of Americans* (1925) or in the line “Rose is a Rose is a Rose...”, most strikingly in *The World is Round* (1939) where the phrase is carved all around the stem of a tree, creating a loop-structure that can virtually go on ad infinitum. Many of Stein’s works invest “in a literary use of the loop as a structuring device which returns upon itself and thereby undermines traditional expectations regarding narrative, descriptive progression, and closure” (Delville 2013, 78). Later examples already contain certain specifics of loops: A poem by Dieter Roth¹⁵, in which the sentence “eine Blume stand darin” [a flower stood in it (in a vase, MM)] is repeated about two-hundred times so that the number of cycles becomes innumerable and – if articulated steadily in constant prosody – resembles the aesthetics of a technologically created loop. Closely related to concrete poetry is *Four-Directional Song of Doubt for Five Voices* (1964) by Emmett Williams, a sound poetic composition in which a repertoire of five single words is repeated by five human voices in cycles of various lengths, additionally calling forth the audio-technological method of multi-tracking due to the precise and interlocked speaking-process of several voices in overlapping layers. These examples request a steady and quasi-mechanical repetition from the reciter(s), like a machine, therefore evoking a technological process without deploying it.

Utmost consistent repetitions that resemble machine-like steadiness are paramount in the following examples which point out the difference from mechanically created loops. Lacking the mechanical iteration resulting from audio-technological treatment they are nonetheless being informed

by, or addressing, technology by imitating, or even opposing, it. Compiled under the title *Skip It If You Can* (2017) by German artist Schuldt, this “angry street corner poetry” uses “words as percussions” (subtitles of the work) and is inspired by recordings of rhythmically pounding machinery. It consists of short phrases that Schuldt overheard in the streets of New York during everyday situations in the 1980s.¹⁶ Published as a book with accompanying CD (spoken by the author) and also performed at live events, these pieces repeat phrases like “Run. Run if you can”, “Beat it”, or “No way, don’t even try” in an energetic manner, maintaining utmost sameness. But Schuldt instructs the performer that the pieces are to be spoken live and “none of it [repetitions] should come from means of reproduction such as a loop or the replay of a shorter recording”, making the slightest variation in performance a deliberate element (Schuldt 2017, instructions for performance in the book’s appendix). Although the stoic, umpteen repetitions of short phrases come close to what I define as loops, not least because of its pounding rhythmicality and the highly repetitive structure being the main compositional feature, it explicitly refuses to use media-technology which would enable identical repetitions, instead deliberately incorporating slight variations due to the incapability of human feasibility. The highly repetitive structure indicates the ubiquity of the short phrases as a part of colloquial speech and the everyday soundscape nonetheless. The capability to bother or annoy due to the “angry” character of the chosen phrases converges with the unnerving effect of loops itself. Another work addressing media-technological means without actually deploying them, featuring mere vocal repetitions as a compositional element amongst others, are the *Synth Loops* from Christian Bök’s *The Cyborg Opera* (2005). Bök himself describes this work as “a long poem in progress—a linguistic soundscape that arranges words, not according to their semantic meanings, but according to their phonetic valences, doing so as a literary response to the ambient chatter of technology” (Bök 2005, 80). He notes that the *Synth Loops* “constitute a kind of amateurish experiment, documenting some of my initial efforts to master the elementary vocabulary for a few of the drum kits typically mobilized by beatboxers” (Bök 2005, 86). In *Synth Loops*, electronic and digital machinery is mimicked by a human and the examination of digital technology is additionally pointed out by the reference to beatboxing, a performative genre in which humans imitate sounds of electronic (pop-) music. But this work is a special case as he mainly imitates technological sounds instead of using lexical material, therefore creating a kind of mouth-music, although composed and performed by a poet and with an alleged intention of creating poetry, underlined by his use of terms like “verbalized” or “vocabulary”. With the *Synth Loops*, Bök approaches sound poetry directly from the musical side, the steady repetitiveness of the loop being the structural element that realizes the intended musicality of this work. Anton Bruhin’s *rotomotor* (1978) is also evoking a loop but actually consists of a rhythmically pounding recitation of an ever-rhyming list of short, individual words, generated by a constraint that changes, adds, or erases one letter per cycle. Besides the rhyming similarity of these words, a subtle and precisely calibrated delay-effect makes the words sound even more similar to each other and therefore emphasizing the impression of loop *one word only*.

Although some features of loops may also be found in mere repetitive recitations, the repetitiveness appears stronger in technologically created loops due to the identity of the iterations, repeating the very same element in each cycle. While mere repetitions can emphasize the repeated speech segments and – if repeated for a longer time – lead to semantic satiation, the preciseness, insistence and endurance of loops created by deploying media-technologies increases the potential for inducing apophenia effects like ‘phantom words’. Identical repetitions generated by media-technologies highlights the sameness and identity of the repeated material and the exactness of timing, preventing even the slightest variations in sound, structure and tempo, thereby exceeding human capacities. Besides media technology’s limited accessibility for poets in earlier times, some sound poetry works used (and still use) mere repetitions without productively using media technologies to address or challenge human capacities, deliberately integrating slight variations in their works. Others are mimicking electronic sounds and media, or may be inspired by the aesthetics of media-technologies without actually deploying them. The deliberate and productive use of media technologies in (sound)

poetry acknowledges and broaches the issue of technology in artistic processes and society alike, making use of its affordances but also, in specific cases, expanding and challenging them. Media technologies enable poetic procedures and effects that would not be possible without them, for they intervene in the acoustic “raw material of all poetry” in order to profitably bypass the coding of the alphabet through “timeline manipulations” and being able to break up individual words, syllables, or sounds at any point and to reassemble these acoustic fragments (Kittler 1999 [1986], 36). An additional aspect is that the use of media technologies in some cases results in unforeseen outcomes (e.g. Steve Reich discussed below), surprising even the author of a work, which calls for interpreting the process between human and machine as rather dialogical than unidirectional.

Analog loops in 20th century sound poetry

Numerous sound poets deploy loop structures produced with audio-technologies since the introduction of the analog magnetic tape machine in the 1950s: it can be considered the main technological device for compositional use in sound poetry before the advent of digital media technologies, because of its ability to record, playback, edit, overdub and loop by coiling a string of tape (cf. Lentz 2000, 598–599; Olsson 2011). Although lacking the precision of digital technologies, analog technologies already allow the repetition of identical material to achieve what I define as a loop. The productive use of media-technologies for composition in sound poetry thereby outstrips human limitations by repeating the exact same material potentially infinitely and also enabling to repeat shortest snippets of speech. This affects the artistic possibilities as well as the specific aesthetics of sound poetry.

Among the earliest examples for the productive use of the tape machine are early tape compositions by Steve Reich that have been considered sound poetry because they solely use recordings of speech as material (cf. Lentz 2000, 1223) – and Reich has been influenced by poetry in his early work.¹⁷ They are examples for composing as ‘gradual process’ where a set of rules is pre-defined and then played out without further action by the composer: “once the process is set up and loaded it runs itself” (Reich 2004, 34). Regardless of the phenomenon of ‘semantic satiation’ Reich claimed that repetition intensifies the meaning of the words (cf. Reich 2004, 19). The voice on *Come Out* (1966) is by Daniel Hamm, one of six Black men falsely accused for murder. The original recordings of about ten hours duration were handed over to Reich by author and political activist Truman Nelson to compose a piece based on them and to present it at a beneficiary event for a re-trial of the accused. In one recording Hamm describes that “I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them”, because a hospital refused to treat him as emergency patient after he was beaten by the police but couldn’t show any bleeding wounds. This sentence by Hamm is the sole material of the piece which begins with three cycles of the sentence in its entirety. After this initial opener indicates the context of the sentence – a context still present and exigent at the first public presentation of the piece at the beneficiary event in April 1966 – the loop is divided onto two tapes and step by step reducing the length of the tape-loops to fractions of the sentence (like “come out” for several cycles) and progresses further in reduction to mere particles and tight repetitions only achievable by technological editing and looping. An important feature is the gradually increasing divergence of the loops’ durations that Reich discovered by accident while working on the piece (cf. Reich 2002, 20), resulting in phase-shifting that may trigger psychoacoustic effects.¹⁸ As Reich discovered these effects by accident but nonetheless embraced them as a compositional feature, it is moreover an example for a productive dialogue between machine and human. The piece features a highly energetic, dense, unnerving and troubling rhythmical structure that can be associated with the heated atmosphere of racism, juridical bias, and police brutality.¹⁹ A striking example of how form – the tight structure of speech-loops – achieved by electro-acoustic treatment has the ability to emphasize and expand its content (even by reduction!), associations and meaning. Although Reich’s pieces have been acknowledged for their social-political implications, it seems a challenge to situate

the music and its appropriate social and political context as well as the role of the composer in relation to the sound material and its vocal source(s) – maybe even more so from today's perspective concerning discussions of ethnicity, identity and power-relations (cf. Scherzinger 2005).

Making use of the possibilities of vinyl discs and shifting the productive audio-technological potential to the means of reproduction (!) are two pieces on the vinyl anthology *10+2: 12 American Text Sound Pieces* (1975).²⁰ They are cut into the end-groove of the record, thus resulting in a closed locked-groove, virtually running endlessly: *Crickets* by Aram Saroyan repeats the title-word 'crickets' over and over again, creating a sound pattern resembling the noise made by actual crickets, highlighting the onomatopoeic character of this looped word; in *Population Explosion* by Anthony Gnazzo a 'bang' is repeated over and over again, creating a kind of nano-narrative by indicating the birth of yet another child with this onomatopoeic utterance. Both pieces have a fixed duration of the respective loop due to the material limit of a vinyl record (at 33,3 r.p.m. resulting in a loop of 1.8 seconds).²¹

Slightly evoking a skipping record because of 'hard' cutting but produced with magnetic tape and using pre-recorded material is Nicolaus Einhorn's *Don't You Maybe / The Essential Interview* (1975). It consists of an isolated fragment of colloquial speech of John Cage and a second voice in conversation. By featuring Cage's voice and words (allegedly recognizable to a wider public at the time) it can trigger further references and associations. Considered to be produced, according to Einhorn, out of 'recording-waste'²² and applying tape loops partly because of the relative effortlessness, there is however at least some structural development: the stoical repetition of the loop combined with the question and its stuttering, unfinished answer by the second voice makes *Don't You Maybe / The Essential Interview* an unrelenting questioning for the question's sake, indirectly addressing the listener. It "establishes a series of tautological circularities, underlined by the repetition of Cage's 'smile / little laugh'".²³ It could be interpreted as an iterative, quasi-therapeutic means to find out something about oneself, to pose general questions about oneself while listening, but when the piece finally turns into Cage's laughter it subverts this interpretation and reveals the character of a humorous little 'hoax'.²⁴ Another example by Einhorn is *Arbeiten* (1973) which completely relies on loops of the word "arbeiten" (working) by various voices, including the author's own. By layering the different voices over another, the piece also features multi-tracking as its second main structural element achieved by the productive use of media technology. Its loop structure addresses – and performs – the monotony and repetitiveness of work emphasizing the work's content through its specific form.

Exploiting steady repetitiveness of single words or short phrases for its sound and musical qualities is American composer and sound poet Charles Amirkhanian. Influenced by modernist writing such as Gertrude Stein's (cf. Davis and Stone 1986, 254), he loops his own voice on tapes and chooses his language material "for [...] sonority, rhythmic profile, and texture rather than their meaning" (Suzuki 2015, 9). The dense and mesmerizing *Seatbelt Seatbelt* (1973) solely consists of the energetically intoned word 'seatbelt'. It features a dense loop structure with varying start- and end-points, causing overlaps and percussive clusters of speech particles resulting in a high grade of musicality. Already indicating repetition in the title, the dense and energetic loop structure makes the word material seemingly dance.²⁵

These examples show that analog media technologies already enable the creation of loops that exceed the possibilities of mere oral recitation: by making use of the technological affordances – like tape loops – the creative possibilities for the compositional process are manifold, sometimes even surprising the author/composer. Although there are significant differences between the use of analog compared to digital technologies, deploying media technologies for creation can thus be considered a distinctive and important aesthetic quality in general.

Digital loops in contemporary sound poetry

Applying digital technologies in the compositional process facilitates the usability and increases the aesthetic potential compared to analog technologies. Nowadays' digital audio technologies (like

simple and free-of-cost DAWs on personal computers) are relatively easy to handle and widely accessible. They offer a higher precision in editing and looping material because the position of a cut and the length of a loop can be determined with an exactness down to the granular level (about 1/24.000th of a second, depending on the resolution). This allows to precisely iterate nano-snippets of speech or create extremely subtle phase-shifts of two loops running slightly out of sync – what Steve Reich discovered by accident and with limited precision by using analog tape can be obtained much more predetermined and precise with digital technologies. Another factor is the increased handiness and affordability of digital effect pedals such as loop-stations which are frequently used in sound poetry performances. Furthermore, online resources such as databases for (speech) recordings make a difference in the compositional process due to the effortless availability of various material to sample – from poetry readings to news and colloquial speech.

Making use of online resources and easy-to-use digital technology is Dagmara Kraus in *Xurf your Zwöbes. Lied aus Pastior* (2016). Composed on a laptop with a simple sound-software and made out of a recording of a poetry reading by Oskar Pastior found on the internet²⁶ it features excessive editing of the source material, re-composing it due to an intuitive musicality and creating a poetic fictional language. While Pastior himself created his very own poetic language full of lexical mutations and neologisms, Kraus moves this ‘neological’ (and literally *poietic*) approach up a notch by including the sound-glitches that result from the rough editing manner as elements of the displayed fictional language, integrating these audio-technological glitches as imaginary quasi-phonemes. The piece features several passages consisting of loops, some of which may be capable of creating apophenia due to the short duration of its cycles. This is remarkable because the ‘language’ that we actually hear is an electro-acoustically constructed language (with hardly any lexical references), the loop passages open up the potential emergence of phantom words in the mind of the listener (with lexical references)! The loops can even be interpreted as a special feature of this phantasy language, pointing out its artificiality and imaginative potential. The musicality of the work due to the loop passages as well as the method of composition and the underlying material is already indicated in the work’s subtitle ‘Lied aus Pastior’ (song made out of Pastior). The small-scale structure of the editing induces density and nervousness and refers to electroacoustic processing which comes to the fore as an intrinsic element which could only be realized as an electroacoustic text (cf. Kriwet 1970, 42).

Loops as an additional but prominent feature are deployed in the series *Événements 09* (2011) as a background-track. Composed and spoken by Anne-James Chaton, this “poor literature”²⁷ uses the names of established persons (Pina Bausch, Barack Obama), political movements (Taliban), slogans (Pop is dead), as well as terms of political origin (Le Printemps de Teheran) taken from news headlines, referring to topics of high public awareness and the time of the pieces’ creation. They consist of two layers: in one layer, these found texts are mechanically looped and generate a pounding rhythm as a cohesive structure; in a second layer the author recites other found texts taken from everyday contexts (e.g. receipts, shopping lists, metro tickets) in a dense, monotonous manner. A special feature of the album is that the nine finished pieces, *Événements No. 20–28*, are accompanied by nine short loops as additional tracks that make accessible the mentioned cohesive structure of the actual pieces by exhibiting the isolated loops for the duration of a few cycles. The loops are audio-technologically filtered to enhance the lower frequencies and to generate a beat (close-mic) as a pounding base – like a bass-drum in techno or hip hop music. Because of the mixing and sound design, these pieces are rich of rhythmical musicality and challenge a figure/ground hierarchy by levelling its two tracks at the same volume. They can thus be interpreted as supporting the textual content of recurring news and data of everyday-life, converging the levels of form and content.

An example in which an algorithmically generated loop-structure is the sole and superordinate principle of composition is *Could Change. A Word Composition* (2022) by myself [Marc Matter]. Gradually shifting the loop’s start- and endpoints with utmost precision only achievable with digital technology, it features a custom-made algorithm programmed by Florian Zeeh. Short text fragments

of a few syllables taken from news headlines and voiced by a tweaked speech-synthesis are looped and replaced throughout the piece with other selections of the exact same length resulting in pounding iterations displaying cut-up aesthetics and excessive editing. The strict and utmost precise gradual process that cuts into words, revealing new text-loops over and over again, turns it into 'speech-music' that at times resembling a technologically enhanced phantasy-language including mechanical stutters and glitches as its elements. Explicitly inspired by Diana Deutsch's concept of 'phantom words' it invites listeners to let words or sentences associatively appear in their perception. It deliberately mixes an openness of interpretation with the urgency and determinacy of news headlines, opening up the discourse of news with all its political and social implications to an infinite reflection.

A special case of loops are mechanical repetitions without repeating an identical speech-fragment but different ones with an identical content: *Frank Walter Steinmeier* (2021) by Jürgen Stollhans uses various samples from TV or radio broadcasts (enabling further associations due to the samples' origins) that tightly repeat the name of German president Frank Walter Steinmeier.²⁸ The fact that the various samples are spoken by different voices – not repeating just a single, identical sample – indicates that they have been taken from more than one source. Due to the sole and stupendous repetition of the politician's name by radio and TV-voices the piece evokes a ubiquity of Steinmeier in public discourse and his role as President, referring to a collective impression of omnipresence. The loop structure and the sole use of the politician's name has a semantic effect of overflow by amassment of material.

These examples illustrate the general influence and additional possibilities of digital technologies used in a compositional manner compared to analog technologies: Micro-scale editing and the use of online resources make works like *Xurf Your Zwöbes. Lied Aus Pastior* or *Frank Walter Steinmeier* possible; the precision of algorithmic editing and looping enable a gradually shifting structure like in *Could Change*; and *Événements 09* features a combination of analog audio aesthetics and a digital sensibility informed by techno music, furthermore associating it to raw-material in online databases and a 'prosumer' (productive-consumer) approach by making accessible isolated elements of the work. In *Événements 09* and even more so in *Could Change* the loop structure evokes the impression of infinity, also resonating with the works' contents by supporting the aspect of the never-ending flow of everyday texts and news headlines. The productive use of digital technologies increases compositional features such as precision of editing and iterations, the shortness of the looped snippets, or the layering of loops. Additional features of digitality such as algorithmic²⁹ coding, speech synthesis and the inclusion of online resources related to sound poetry open up new compositional possibilities and interpretative contexts.

Conclusion

As I have shown, there are several examples of loops in sound poetry where the structural element of repeating short, identical speech material dominates the overall character of a work and influences its associations and meaning. Loops can be produced relatively easy due to today's technological possibilities and make use of the possibilities of audio- and media-technologies in production and composition. Digital technologies enable utmost precise iterations of identical material which in relation to sound poetry means that the very same speech-sounds, words, or phrases can be iterated for an innumerable duration, exceeding human capacities. Loops also challenge linear concepts of time, turning the time-axis from linear – a fragment of speech with beginning and end – to cyclical – when beginning and end seemingly vanish due to the cyclical structure. Turning the linearity of speech into a cyclical structure bears meaning on a meta-level and can be considered a significant poetic information, adding to the meaning (semantic level) of a (sound) poem. Whether spoken by the author(s), sampling 'found speech' and thereby expanding the range of associations, or making use of speech synthesis closely related to digitality, loops also (but not exclusively) show the variety of 'voices' used in sound poetry. Loops explore and exploit the aesthetic effects of extreme

repetition and rhythmicity resulting in an ambiguous state between stasis and movement, apathy and mesmerizing, therefore enabling the association with different aspects of meaning, up to tautological accordance of form and content by repeating again and again. They are an example of the poetic mode of perceiving spoken language, in which referential and nonreferential aspects converge. The repetitive structure of a loop can become a self-evident element which can itself be semanticized and furthermore has the ability to transform the semantics of a piece to either support, subvert, erode the meaning, or even result in apophenia effects like ‘phantom words’ that only emerge in the mind of a listener. Increasing the musicality of spoken language, loops in sound poetry are a distinctive feature with a high aesthetical impact that can make words dance.

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Notes

¹ For a general discussion of loops with an emphasis on music, see Baumgärtel 2016.

² On the repetition of single words, see Lausberg 1960, 311–332.

³ For more examples, see Rakusa 2016.

⁴ For lists as a poetic form in concrete poetry, see Cotton 2008.

⁵ Created by using closed (locked) grooves on gramophones and later magnetic tape loops, the repetitive structure helped to render raw sound material into ‘sound objects’ by making sounds more “abstract” while tearing them “from their context” (Schaeffer 2017 [1966], 8, 310–311).

⁶ Opposed to ‘static’ approaches of minimal music by La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, Tony Conrad, John Cale, Phil Niblock, amongst others.

⁷ Released on cassette tape by Balsam Flex, 1981.

⁸ Released on the vinyl anthology *Disconnected*, released by Giorno Poetry Systems, 1974.

⁹ The “ever-expanding technical facilities” in “sound poetry can create effects that have never been produced before, thus opening a new frontier for poets” (Burroughs 1979, 9).

¹⁰ A recent album of digital sound poetry that highlights the musicality of looped speech fragments is *dark dad* (2021) by c l o v 3 n (aka cris cheek).

¹¹ “Die unklassische Wiederholung [...] hebt die temporalisierte Zeit auf, sie zielt ab auf die Herstellung einer virtuellen Gleichzeitigkeit, in der kein Platz mehr ist für hermeneutische Vermittlungen.” (Lobsien 1995, 224); and: „Noch die banalste, mechanischste, stereotypischste Wiederholung hat ihren Wert darin, daß sie die Verwobenheit der Wiederholungsebenen erschließt [...], begriffslos, in der ästhetischen Erfahrung als Gewärtigung einer paradoxen Doppelbewegung aus Sinnkumulierung und Sinnentzug. (Lobsien 1995, 226).

¹² An example for the monotonous repetition of a short, self-referential sentence in media art is *I Am Making Art* (John Baldessari, 1971), cf. Benthien et al. 2019, 53.

¹³ Psychologist Diana Deutsch, who coined the term ‘phantom words’, produced tight loops of bi-syllabic words to investigate “how our knowledge, beliefs and expectations create illusions of speech” (Deutsch

2019, 103). Deutsch showed that ‘phantom words’ are not intersubjective but rather represent what is on the listener’s mind at the moment of reception, also depending on a listener’s mood, emotional stress, the specific listening situation, as well as expectations and previous knowledge, comparable to how a viewer interprets a Rorschach test.

¹⁴ Info-text on Bandcamp <https://barbaraellison.bandcamp.com/album/cybersongs-2> (7 February 2023).

¹⁵ In *Frühe Schriften und typische Scheiße*. Darmstadt und Neuwied: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1973. Unpaginated.

¹⁶ Ezra Pound noted that one can “imitate the sound of machinery verbally” and by that making “new words”; although remarking that these procedures are “insufficient equipment for the complete man of letters...” Pound 1968 [1927], 52–53.

¹⁷ Even in the early 2000s he stated that, besides digital sampling as a method, he is mainly interested in the human speaking voice as material (cf. Reich 2004, 184).

¹⁸ “First the loop is in unison with itself. As it begins to go out of phase, a slowly increasing reverberation is heard. This gradually passes into a canon or round for two voices, then four and finally eight.” (Reich 2004, 22).

¹⁹ For a critical examination of this composition, its historical context, mode of production/composition, and aspects of ethnicity, whiteness, and privilege, and the problem of the political in this work, see Biareishyk 2012; Gopinath 2009.

²⁰ To my knowledge there are only few any examples of the productive use of turntables as compositional tools in sound poetry; for an early approach in productively using the affordances of gramophones by composer Ernst Toch see Katz 2001; a contemporary sound poet working with turntables is W. Mark Sutherland

²¹ Given that the listener does not alter the playback speed of the turntable!

²² Described by Einhorn as such in an interview conducted by the author in Düsseldorf, October 2020

²³ Liner-notes to the piece in the accompanying booklet to the vinyl anthology *Futura Poesia Sonora*. Ed. Arrigo Lora-Totino. Milan, Cramps Records, 1978.

²⁴ Einhorn, although extremely humble about his own works, used the very term in the above-mentioned interview.

²⁵ It comes as no surprise that one of Amirkhanian’s records is entitled *Lexical Music* (1979). A compilation of sound poetry by Lily Greenham is entitled *Lingual Music* (2007).

²⁶ On the online archive of poetry readings, <https://www.lyrikline.org> (20 February 2023).

²⁷ A term used in the release-info of the album by Chaton himself: <https://raster-media.net/shop/evenements-09> (20 February 2023).

²⁸ Published on a compilation released as audio-cassette and download/stream: *Incident Occurred by Incoherent Accident*. Berlin: Carrots Tapes, 2021. <https://carrotstapes.bandcamp.com/track/j-r-gen-stollhans-frank-waltersteinmeier> (09 February 2023).

²⁹ Although algorithmic processes in literature and poetry are not dependent on electronic or digital media technologies and have been realized for centuries, cf. Cramer 2005.

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Writing the Stage: Intermediality, Textual Theatricality, and *Hag-Seed* as a Theatre-Fiction

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Abstract: Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, as a retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, employs a hybrid style of dramaturgical and performative writing in its novelistic narrative. From the dramaturgical framework that affords theatrical happenings to the ekphrastic recreation of theatrical liveness, it creates for the reader an embodied, lively, and intermedial reading experience. Thus, this article explores the intermedial poetics of *Hag-Seed*, focusing on its textual exploration of the theatrical form from different perspectives, and its situatedness in the Canadian theatre and adaptation context in parallel with the dance company Kidd Pivot and their 2011 production *The Tempest Replica*. Drawing on the intermedial genre of theatre-fiction, it seeks to address how the intermedial poetics of textual theatricality enacts the readers' embodied perception of theatrical liveness and explores the porous mediality of both novel and theatre.

Keywords: intermedial poetics, textuality, theatricality, *Hag-Seed*, theatre-fiction

In Harold Pinter's lecture at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962 "Writing for the Theatre", he offered his observation of the difference between theatre and writing: "The theatre is a large, energetic, public activity. Writing is, for me, a completely private activity, a poem or a play, no difference. These facts are not easy to reconcile" (10). Accordingly, if writing for the theatre could be regarded as an intermedial exchange between word and body, page and space, private and public, then writing about the theatre offers the audience an iterative framework through which the intermedial poetics of text and theatre may be self-consciously and self-reflexively approached. Writing about the theatre, or "theatre-fiction" as defined by Graham Wolfe, denotes the writing of "novels and stories that engage in concrete and sustained ways with theatre as artistic practice and industry" (2). Beyond using theatre as a mere metaphor, theatre-fiction achieves intersectional, intermedial "novelistic engagement with theatre as art-form" (3). Instead of focusing on the staged illusions and spectacles, it provides textual representations of theatre from "irregular, oblique" vantage points: production and development, backstage and onstage, rehearsal, performance, and spectatorial reception, etc. – leading to a textual representation with "more theatre than theatre itself" (7). Theatre-fiction thus becomes "a criss-crossing of text and performance, whose distinct medialities do not blend into each other but interact and mutually inform" (Yang and Wang 2).

Margaret Atwood's 2016 novel *Hag-Seed*, a retelling of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare commissioned by the Hogarth Shakespeare Series, falls into the category of theatre-fiction. Elaborating on the enigmatical last three words of the play—"set me free", Atwood transfers Prospero, the wronged Duke of Milan exiled on a small island, into an avant-garde theatre director, Felix Phillips. Felix was once the leading figure of the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival and was about to stage an experimental production of *The Tempest*, when Meningitis took away his daughter Miranda. Overshadowed by her death, Felix immersed himself in his career. But to add insult to injury, the production was cancelled because his colleague Tony usurped his position and expelled him from the theatre. The main plot begins twelve years after, when Felix, having been the director of a prison theatre project

for three years, finally seizes his chance for revenge as those who betrayed him are invited to his showcase performance: theatre thus becomes at once a ritual of mourning and a device of revenge.

Atwood's *Hag-Seed* employs a hybrid style of dramaturgical and performative writing in its novelistic narrative. The chronological account of Felix's revenge from a conventionally third-person perspective combined with the playscript formatted Prologue, which is later repeated as the novel's Chapter 34, trespasses the boundaries between textuality and theatricality. In the fictional narrative, Atwood also incorporates detailed descriptions of the visualities of theatre performances by the fictional characters and real-life theatre companies. This hybridity of form from dramaturgical framework that affords theatrical happenings to the ekphrastic recreation of theatrical liveness creates for the reader an embodied, lively, and intermedial reading experience, which "synthesizes reading with seeing in a dynamic process" (Wang 14). Thus, this article explores the intermedial poetics of *Hag-Seed*, focusing on its textual exploration of the theatrical form from different perspectives, and its situatedness in the Canadian theatre and adaptation context in parallel with the dance company Kidd Pivot and their 2011 production *The Tempest Replica*. Drawing on the intermedial genre of theatre-fiction, it seeks to address how the intermedial poetics of textual theatricality enacts the readers' embodied perception of theatrical liveness and explores the porous mediality of both novel and theatre.

Dramaturgical and Ekphrastic Writing

On her rewriting of *The Tempest*, Atwood remarked that "Of all Shakespeare's plays, this one is most obviously about plays, directing and acting" ("Perfect Storm"). And back in her 2002 collection of essays *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood recognised Prospero as a metatheatrical character: "At the end of the play Prospero speaks the Epilogue, both in his own character and in that of the actor that plays him; and also in that of the author who has created him, yet another behind-the-scenes tyrannical controller of the action" (115–116). The setting of the novel is based on this metatheatrical reading, as partially a reintegration of the dramatic plot into novelistic form, as well as a textual exploration of the dramaturgical form.

Atwood applied a hybridity of writing styles in *Hag-Seed*, combining both play-script-formatted dramaturgical writing and ekphrastic descriptions of the *mise-en-scène* visualities. The Prologue of *Hag-Seed* is written in the form of a play scene, which is repeated verbatim as the novel's Chapter 34:

The house lights dim. The audience quiets.

ON THE BIG FLATSCREEN: *Jagged yellow lettering on black:*

THE TEMPEST

By William Shakespeare

with

The Fletcher Correctional Players

ONSCREEN: *A hand-printed sign, held up to the camera by Announcer, wearing a short purple velvet cloak.*

In his other hand, a quill.

SIGN: A SUDDEN TEMPEST

ANNOUNCER: What you're gonna see, is a storm at sea:

Winds are howlin', sailors yowlin',

Passengers cursin' 'em, 'cause it gettin' worse:

Gonna hear screams, just like a ba-a-d dream,

But not all here is what it seem,

Just sayin'.

Grins.

Now we gonna start the playin'. (3, 210)

The screened show itself, being the final production of Felix's literacy project, becomes the play-within-a-play through which his frame plot could proceed: Tony and Sal (matching Antonio and

Alonso in *The Tempest*), having become federal ministers, are invited to the project showcase, where Felix has arranged for them an immersive prison riot show to trick the unknowing audience into fearful confessions. At the end of the Prologue, the screening ends abruptly with darkness, sounds of gunshots, and potential chaos:

Total darkness. Confused noise from outside the room. Yelling. Shots are fired.

A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE: What's going on?

VOICES, FROM OUTSIDE THE ROOM: Lockdown! Lockdown!

A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE: Who's in charge here?

Three more shots.

A VOICE, FROM INSIDE THE ROOM: Don't move! Quiet! Keep your heads down! Stay right where you are. (4, 211)

Thus ends the scene, and the novelistic narrative constituting the majority of the novel begins in the following chapters. Without any background information provided, except for the reader's potential familiarity with the Shakespearean play, the dramaturgical writing in the Prologue of *Hag-Seed* foregrounds, instead of diachronic setting or characterisation, performativity and temporal-spatial immersiveness as the primary reading experience. And as for Chapter 34, which is inserted into the chronological storytelling, the shift of narrative form affords the further transition from the "tyrannical" dramatic fixity to descriptive textual-theatrical liveness.

The on-screen re-writing of Shakespeare's lines recontextualises *The Tempest* into the contemporary hip-hop culture, which nevertheless remains compliant with the "textually legislated form" of literary drama (Worthen xvii). While as the screening stops and the narrative focus shifts away from the embedded, the literary play-within-a-play melts into its loosely-structured metatheatrical frame and the literary textuality is diffused into spatialised, corporeal theatricality. The two-dimensional screen of the recorded *Tempest* performance demonstrates a perspectival stage-auditorium relationship similar to that of the proscenium-arched theatre: with body and space plasticised and abstracted from a "vision in the first person" (Causey 69). The audience's voluntary suspension of disbelief is predicated upon the sense of security endowed by awareness of the segmenting screen/fourth wall. This flattened performance is, however, posited in contrast with the immersive scene of the prison riot, in which unconscious spectatorial participation is constitutive of the dramaturgy. The unknowing audience's compliance with spectatorial etiquette is juxtaposed with the performative hijacking, demonstrating an almost coercive power relation through which spectatorial response and experience can be plotted and controlled. At the same time, it also entails a dangerously fleeting liveness that cannot be pinned down and contained within the prescriptive dramaturgical writing.

In this vein, Felix's open-ended, participatory design of the prison riot performance leads to a dramaturgically framed happening, which is at once plotted and manipulated while also containing a dangerous liveness, the "surprisingness of the unscripted, the impromptu and the unpredictability of an improvised situation" (Peters 171). The participatory happening can no longer be accommodated by textual-dramaturgical specificities. Therefore, Chapter 34 "Tempest", marking the beginning of Felix's show, is followed by ekphrastic descriptions of the performative event instead of dramatic dialogues and stage directions. Chapter 35 opens with the panicked shoutings of the audience:

A black wool hand claps over Freddie's eyes, then a hood slips over his head and he's lifted out of his seat.

"What the fuck?" he yells. "Let go!"

"You're goin' overboard," says a voice. "Hell is empty, and all the devils are here!"

"It's a prison riot." The voice of Tony. "Keep calm. Don't provoke them. Hit the button on your pager. Wait—"

"What pager?" The voice of Sebert. "It's gone!"

"Wait! Wait!" shouts Freddie. "Let go! Why are you pinching me? Ow!" His voice recedes toward the back of the room.

"Freddie!" The voice of Sal, shouting. "What're you doing? He's my son! I'll kill you! Bring him back!"

"Shut up." A voice in the darkness. "A plague upon this howling! Heads on the desk, hands clasped behind your neck! Now!"
Door opening, closing. (213)

Remaining in the frame of Felix's design and, metafictionally, the plot of *The Tempest*, as is echoed by the images of imprisonment throughout the novel, Tony's and Sal's reactions are however spontaneously induced and contain subversive possibilities of the "irruption of the real" (Lehmann 99). The positionality of Felix, the controlling director and the contemporary Prospero, is also shifted from the backstage director to an in-between actor-spectator who is at once an informed participant in the performance and an enthusiastic bystander who watches the happening unfold. For live theatre, this is precisely the point where theatre's own mediality, "spatiotemporal co-presence, interaction, realistic representation, ephemerality and risk", overthrows the priority of literary text (Georgi 2). While for novelistic writing, for which the text is written not for performance but for its own sake, the conventional playwriting style is insufficient to capture the medial fluidity and ever-disappearing visuality of live performance. Instead, through the ekphrastic recreation of the show's *mise-en-scène* design and its spatial relationality with the audience from multiple perspectives, Atwood has created a stage on pages where the theatrical liveness of *The Tempest* is intermedially invoked.

In Chapter 37 "Charm Cracks Not", for example, the audience group Serbert (matching Sebastian), Lonnie (matching Gonzalo), Tony, and Sal, have been led out of the screening room through the corridor into the green room, where Felix plans to frighten them into confessions. As the disoriented guests explore the space, in a similar way that stage settings are physically measured by the performers' movement for the theatre audience's perception, the setting of the room is ekphrastically recreated in text:

On the screen, they watch the four men as they approach the Green Room door. To either side of it, taped to the wall, there's a cutout—a T-rex, a space creature—ushering them in.
"Excellent dumb discourse," Felix murmurs to himself.
"What is this, a kindergarten?" says Sebert. "First palm trees, now this!" "Who's running this place?" says Sal. "There needs to be some changes!" He feels his forehead.
"Is that a dinosaur? I feel weird. I think I've got a fever." But they all go in through the doorway.
"What's this?" says Tony. "It's like a theatre green room! There's even a freaking fruit bowl! Though it's only grapes. There ought to be some crackers and cheese, on a plate." (224)

Therefore, by way of the style shifting, Atwood's writing offers a lively intermedial reading experience, which departs from playwriting, as the basis of the metatheatrical designs and the novel's own status as an adaptation, to the dramaturgical writing that frames a sphere of theatrical happening, and eventually to the ekphrastic recreation of theatrical liveness.

Theatre and Its Adaptation: Kidd Pivot and *The Tempest Replica* (2011)

In Felix's prison project, for the part of Miranda, Prospero's daughter, the leading and only female character in *The Tempest*, Felix invited a guest actress Anne-Marie Greenland, who was a dancer with the Canadian contemporary dance theatre company Kidd Pivot. She quitted the company before their production of *The Tempest Replica* due to injury, and became a choreographer years later. Unlike Makeshiweg Theatre, the fictional theatre Felix used to work for, Kidd Pivot is a real-life practising company establishing, under the direction of choreographer Crystal Pite, a stellar reputation in the contemporary dance theatre scene. Hailed for their "conceptual deftness" balanced by the "exhilarating kick" of dance-making, Kidd Pivot's dramaturgical approach is a combination of affective kineshetics, theatricality, dramatic narrative, and the often-self-reflexive exploration of movement and physicality (Jennings).

The Tempest Replica (2011) was a major production of Kidd Pivot, which premiered in 2011 at Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, Germany. It is a metatheatrical re-interpretation of *The Tempest*

and performative re-enactment itself, focusing on the “duplication of character and copy, the story and the body” (Kidd Pivot). The show creates a doubled space of action, with “a maquette of Shakespeare’s island as a metaphor for isolation, captivity and desire”, where “chalk-white replicas deliver the essential plot points of the story”, and as its mirror “a nostalgic cityscape that evokes longing”, in which “the emotion and tension of the narrative are fleshed out by real characters” (Kidd Pivot).

The show itself is not represented in detail in the novel, with its title mentioned only once when Felix went through Anne-Marie’s career background on the Internet. While reference to the show itself has posited *Hag-Seed* in the context of Canadian theatre and Shakespearean adaptations, the abundance of which let out a glimpse of a dynamic yet chaotic field. Despite the relative emancipation from the “filial model” of adaptation demanding full loyalty to the original Shakespearean text, adaptations nowadays still risk being “kitsch, propaganda, anti-Stratfordianism, and the vulgarly commercial or pornographic” in the sea of Shakespearean adaptations (Shahani and Charry 175; Lanier 34). While on the other hand, the diversity of perspectives and formal experimentations to deconstruct and reconstruct the Shakespearean canon have also opened up a field of dialogue, upon which new interpretations are mutually informed, influenced, or contested.

As a dance theatre company, Kidd Pivot’s physical approaches make a stark contrast with the text-based rewriting of Atwood. The former invests affects and reflections in movement and corporeality, while the latter draws from the literary device of the text. While both being intermedial re-explorations of Shakespeare’s drama, *The Tempest Replica* and *Hag-Seed* demonstrate, in addition to their shared contextual awareness of contemporaneity, the adaptation aesthetics of formal self-reflexivity and a willingness to trespass disciplinary and stylistic confinements. In *The Tempest Replica*, the mannequin characters’ “step-by-step exposition” is both a self-reflexive exploration of classical choreography disassemblable into virtuoso movements and a deconstruction of mimetic characterisation as flattening the duality of embodiment (Jennings). In the second part, when the white, dehumanising costume is changed into contemporary garments and characters into dancers, the choreography is transformed into emotionally charged “pure dance”, and narrative meaning-making is invested into the sheer power of physicality instead of gestural representation. The writing of the dramatic, the dramaturgical, and the theatrical in *Hag-Seed* also echoes with the medial and intermedial reflections in *The Tempest Replica*.

Besides, Atwood also aligns the readers’ reading experience with their spectatorial experience, as well as perhaps that of herself. Focusing on Anne-Marie’s physical expressiveness, an ekphrastic description of her dance movements is provided through Felix and the inmates’ perspective, while they are shown her performance video on screen:

Anne-Marie pirouettes, circling her partner, who is rolling across the floor. She does a backflip, lands on her feet. A second male dancer bounces in, picks her up, and slings her over his shoulder, her feet flailing. She’s on the ground again; she takes, briefly, the stance of a boxer, but then she flees and there’s a chase, with both of the male dancers pursuing her. She stops, lifts a foot, flexes it, kicks with her heel. Down they go, in graceful tandem. Anne-Marie leaps into the air, higher than you’d think possible. (100)

The contemporary dance scene is both deeply rooted in the Canadian performance sector and the global dance culture. Anne-Marie’s execution of choreographic movements epitomises the contemporary dance’s energetic flow, relationality with other bodies, control of the body, and playfulness with gravity. The readers’ prior experience of contemporary dance, if any, would be visually and kinesthetically activated and the experience of watching is simulated through the act of reading.

At the end of the novel, Anne-Marie’s interpretation of Miranda after the show itself has ended again connects the act of reading with the reader’s possible real-life spectatorial experience. At the end of the literacy project, every performer is required by Felix to come up with their own version of *The Tempest* from each of their characters, which is a moving reimagination of Prospero’s renun-

ciation of his magic. In Chapter 43 “Team Miranda”, Anne Marie offers a more personalised embodiment of the character:

Anne-Marie tosses the goddesses back into her knitting bag, springs up on top of Felix’s desk, and stands poised on the edge. Then she bends her knees, raises her hands above her head, and does a 360-twist backflip onto the floor. Now she’s horizontal, scissoring her legs, crossing them, rolling, sitting up, all smooth as iron caramel. It’s a move from her Kidd Pivot routine. (257)

Through directly associating the ekphrastic representation of Anne-Marie’s choreographic movements with her training background with Kidd Pivot, Atwood enables the reader not only to identify the character but also kinesthetically and somatically see her as part of the contemporary dance world, as a presence that carries “traces of their practices in their physicalities”, whose “kinesthetic sense of their world marks their corporealities as bound by time and history” (Kosstrin 26). By contextualising *Hag-Seed* into the intermedial connection and recreation of theatre and adaptation, especially in parallel comparison with Kidd Pivot’s *The Tempest Replica*, Atwood puts her novelistic adaptation in the network of Shakespearean adaptation. Beyond the dramatic text itself, *Hag-Seed* is also consciously engaged with the adaptation culture of intermediality in general and joins in the cacophony of self-conscious re-mediation of the canons. Situated in this context, Atwood creates a shared spectatorship as the substrate for the reading experience, which constitutes the unique mediality of this textual adaptation.

The Textual Theatricality and Enactive Writing of Theatre-Fiction

Hag-Seed, with its formal experiments and allusions to the contemporary theatre context, demonstrates an intermedial poetics of theatre-fiction. Elaborating on the aesthetics of the hybrid genre of theatre-fiction, Wolfe compares literary fiction with those with a distinguished focus on theatre as an art form and an industry:

If literary fiction is a departure from and “enfeeblement” (Scarry 15) of theatre’s physical and bodily things, nowhere does the medium’s materiality receive more rigorous treatment, nowhere are its constitutive transience and co-presence more foregrounded, nowhere are its peculiar contingencies, chemistries, tensions, and feedback loops more vividly registered than on (and through their tensions with) the pages of theatre-novels. (Wolfe 7-8)

The text and the stage have always been closely entangled. In traditional dramatic theatre, or literary plays, the primacy of text as repressive of theatre’s spatial, embodied mediality has been criticised since modernist theatre’s physical turn, which is “often associated with Antonin Artaud and his campaign for an anti-literary and pro-physical theatre” (Ackerman and Puchner, 7). While even for the most literary of plays, the text, albeit being the fundamental of dramatic theatre, demands the temporal-spatial enactment for its medial fulfilment. *Vice versa*, reading a play text can also involve the phenomenologically synaesthetic experience enacting spatial, visual, and sonic perceptions. This enactive model of perception, through which “imagined spaces can convey a sense of presence and immersive detail”, is a commonly used tool in literary imagination and the building of fictional worlds (Polvinen 29). It offers an especially opportune perspective to approach the intermedial incorporation of playwriting in theatre-fiction.

If writing for the stage is, as Pinter suggests, an aporetic interaction between textuality and its medial transformation into the stage, writing about theatre performance in a descriptive fashion is faced with the challenge that, as argued by Peggy Phelan, “the object of one’s meditation, the performance itself, disappears” (3). The fluid, durational, and live theatre performance, if transcribed into signification, loses its medial specificity. Alternatively, Phelan calls for a new model of “performative writing” that communicates phenomenological experience instead of the mere exchange of information, which “enact[s] the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression,

fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious), and made narrow by the muscular force of political repression in all its mutative violence" (12). Both the reading of a play-text, engaging multisensory imagination, and the reading of performative writing, with enactive textuality able to activate the spectatorial experience of watching a performance, fit in the intermedial poetics of theatre-fiction, which yields "peculiar sorceries that may begin to act when we engage with theatre from the oblique angles they offer" and investigates the "fluid boundaries, creative antagonisms, and reciprocal exchanges" between the theatrical and novelistic forms (Wolfe 1-2).

Phelan's performative writing, as well as stage-conscious playwriting, is combined in Atwood's intermedial writing of theatre-fiction in *Hag-Seed*. The juxtaposition of dramaturgical writing and ekphrastic descriptions of theatre performance, intermedially incorporated in novelistic storytelling, recreates a stage through the text for readers' quasi-spectatorial experience. In a larger context, *Hag-Seed* interrogates the existing problems of the theatre industry. The director-centred production procedure often leads to a strict hierarchy, for which Felix exhibits a vivid example. As he told his players during casting: "I'm the director, and these choices are mine... The theatre isn't a republic, it's a monarchy" (147). It points at the marginalisation and aestheticisation of women, especially in canonical theatre productions, with Anne-Marie being the only female performer and assigned a romantic plot. The novel's representation of the prison theatre echoes Leonidas K Cheliotis's warning against the literacy projects in prison being only "decorative justice", etc. (16). While beyond offering an analytical critique of theatre and performance, the enactive intermedial writing creates a simulative experience of theatricality through the text, where the theatre as an art form, an industry, and a public event is represented and experienced as embodied, somatic, and live.

Apart from being a textual exploration of the theatrical mediality, *Hag-Seed* is also an experiment on novelistic writing's intermedial potential to exceed its medial and stylistic boundaries and explore new relationships between the text and the world, the writer and the reader. Through an intermedial writing, *Hag-Seed* invokes the spatialised, embodied art form of theatre, itself a medial complex, which leads to a textual theatricality to engage the readers' multisensory perception of the narrative. Meanwhile, through textual theatricality, the dramatic tension becomes not only a metaphorical plot device but also a medially reinvigorating approach. It achieves an alienating effect from the novelistic narrative, which is an especially appropriate formal renovation for canonical adaptations.

The Epilogue of *Hag-Seed* is entitled "Set Me Free", a quote from Prospero's final monologue "As you from crimes would pardoned be / Let your indulgence set me free" (Atwood 226). It alludes to the prevalent imagery of imprisonment in both the original play and the novel itself: Prospero/Felix is freed from vengeance; Miranda/Anne-Marie is freed from patriarchal control; as the curtain closes, the characters are freed from the enclosed fictive cosmos, the actors from their characters, and the audience from the binding of spectatorship; in a more profound sense, text and theatre from their respective medial boundaries. In this sense, beyond being a novelistic adaptation of Shakespeare's dramatic story, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* is a self-conscious intermedial experiment. Through the writing of a stage, Atwood explores the intermedial porosity between theatre and fiction, which continues to promote reflections on and provide new possibilities for both textual and embodied storytelling.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article investigates the intermedial poetics of textual theatricality in Margaret Atwood's novel *Hag-Seed*. As a retelling of the Shakespearean drama *The Tempest*, *Hag-Seed* recontextualises Prospero as Felix, a 21st-century avant-garde theatre director in Canada. Departing from a metatheatrical reading of *The Tempest*, Atwood adopts the genre of theatre-fiction proposed by Graham Wolfe, which is a form of novelistic writing directly engaged with theatre as an art form and practising industry instead of a mere metaphor. The aforementioned discussions trace the hybrid forms of dramaturgical and ekphrastic writing in *Hag-Seed* and explores its textual construction of theatrical liveness. The sphere of theatrical happening enabled by the dramaturgical

framework is followed by ekphrastic depictions of the visual, spatial, durational, and embodied performance. Besides, comparing *Hag-Seed* and Canadian dance company Kidd Pivot's *The Tempest Replica*, the article also examines the novel's situatedness in the context of theatre and adaptation and how it creates a spectatorial readership invoking real-life experiences with performance art. The enactive intermedial writing of *Hag-Seed* engages the reader's multisensory perception, which leads to reflections on the mediality and porosity of both textual and theatrical arts or media. Through adoption of the genre of theatre-fiction, *Hag-Seed* is an experiment on the porous mediality of both novel and theatre, whose intermedial affordances becomes a productive source for the reinvigoration of both textual and embodied storytelling.

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Poetic-Architectonic Realizations: Louis Kahn and Fumihiko Maki

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Abstract: This study of how poetic content, which both underlies and is revealed by the architectural design process, explores the work of two late twentieth-century modernist architects, Louis Kahn and Fumihiko Maki. Linguistic/poetic elements are revealed in an examination of each architect's built environments. The process and product of creating poetry and designing architecture share essential similarities. Various modernist precepts demonstrate an organic construct of poetic and architectonic experience, when developed within vital design programs. This subtle intermediality is defined through examining Kahn's and Maki's success in developing meaning, as opposed to the typical thrust of architectural critique, which usually concerns itself with form and function.

Keywords: Intermediality, poetic, architecture, Louis Kahn, Fumihiko Maki

Introduction

At the outset of this exploration into the nature of poetic realization in modern architecture, it is worth asking: Must a work of architecture, to be meaningful, speak poetically, or for that matter, develop any semblance of preconceived aesthetic content, other than from its intrinsic character? Or should we conclude that architecture must, by definition, somehow enhance itself by consciously developing poetic content? I suspect the answer lies in what building types we examine, recognizing that there do exist truly inspiring buildings that had no architect or design approach; (see Mesa Verde, Stavkirke of Urnes, Ise Shrine Complex, and so on).¹ To be fair, this exploration of poetic intermediality, addresses only one, often subtle aspect of the architectural design process. However, it is clear that poetry offers us an appropriate aesthetic correlative for architecture, consistent with the euphemism that when buildings inspire, we say that its architect "speaks to us" through his or her building.

From a metaphysical perspective, I believe it would not be inaccurate to define modern societies – and their citizens, who are the 'users' of modern buildings – as a concurrence of both *what we want to do* and *what we are told we must do*. Consider then, that an architect has little-to-no influence on either of these societal imperatives. So not withstanding some remarkable building program, and seen from that metaphysical perspective, an architect's aesthetic sphere of influence is essentially defined by *meaning*, not *purpose*. This limitary parameter, inherent in all building design, constitutes both the impulse and the license toward achieving poetic content in a work of architecture.

Every great architect is – necessarily – a great poet. He must be a great original interpreter of his time, his day, his age.²

Frank Lloyd Wright's epithet could not be more relevant, as it recognizes that architects are interpreters, not masters of their time. However, the following exploration of poetic-architectonic intermediality will focus not on Wright, but instead on two other successful, twentieth century

designers, Louis Kahn and Fumihiko Maki, whose buildings relate clear, although quite different, poetic content. This will take us along a somewhat traditional comparative journey; from understanding the aesthetic principles at work in each discipline, to an appreciation of how those principles were applied in different design processes, and finally to a better understanding of twentieth century culture itself.

In that regard, a brief primer on the language of architecture,³ and some of its poetic counterparts, will be useful. Some of the closely related principles these two distinct arts share are: structure (grammar); abstraction; referential imagery; conceptual integrity (syntax); style (metaphor and simile); spacial organization (mood); and form (prosody). Interestingly, another shared principle – rhythm, relates to movement in architecture, and similarly to “[t]he accommodation of the poet’s individual voice in...the accentual symbolic line,” creating poetic flow.⁴

Just as the rhythm of a poem transports us as we follow the poet’s thoughts, the rhythms of a building – in its columns, windows, floor patterns, lighting scheme – provoke us to move, within or around it. And when the rhythm of a building ‘turns’ or changes in unexpected ways, we experience the same moments of reflection about where we are as we do with the progression of trope in a poem. When we are asked to grasp a linear, or nonlinear, flow of time and space, we instinctively draw closer to a realization of that particular moment and place. As perceptive reality, some people are quite consciously aware of this sense of poetic intermediality in sophisticated works of architecture, although many others will sense it only vaguely or unconsciously; it is simply that some people are more attuned to the subtle qualities of their environment than others.

In addition, there are the direct influences of natural conditions: climate, terrain, tree forms, as well as sounds, acoustics, light and shadow, texture, color and so on, which become poetic elements in the hands of a talented designer; keeping in mind that some of these conditions are more cognitively immediate than others. Architecture always possesses the potential to use these figures to form an underlying poetic sense, because these are some of the same sensations that originally instigated primitive language itself: the aesthetic quality of natural environments as experienced and expressed by our language-forming ancestors. Woven together into an architectonic experience, complementary natural elements and built environments amplify and enhance each other. Naturally, patterns of light and shadow, earthy colors and textures, as well as the sound of water, when integrated into built environments, are imbued with a special poetic quality of their own. It follows that various poetic and architectonic principles, experienced simultaneously as related aspects of meaning and cognition, have been understood as intermediality throughout civilization.

Lastly, regarding structural composition, (formal building elements, now expanded upon by modern engineering), it also has vital poetic potential, through an emotive identification with security and the ordering of our lives.

Taking all this into account, one realizes that architectonic-poetic achievements have qualities that propel a work of architecture *beyond mere considerations of style*, defining a dimension of architecture that has the potential to illuminate cultural significance in unexpected, transformative ways.

Louis I. Kahn, 1901–1974

Poetry and architecture are one and the same for Kahn because “when you think [in terms] of a building, you can’t but think almost immediately of a poem, because a poem to one mind is the same as the building is to another mind. They are both incredible.” And Kahn thinks of developing architectural elements to such an extent they become “a poetic entity”.⁵

This observation, from Ms Pedret’s masters thesis sums up, as no other statement available to me, the intermedial synergy of Kahn’s design process. Louis Kahn was both a professor and a practicing architect. He truly grasped the ‘presence’ inherent in language, an unusual personal achievement in a profession not ordinarily known for skillful elucidation. For many of my peers, he represented an authentic artistic spirit, who somehow found success despite his unorthodox design approach. As a

student, I never had an opportunity to attend one of Kahn's design studios, where he discoursed on these concepts; but in the nineteen-sixties he was well-known for his inspirational style:

He had...built a cult-like following among his graduate students, drawn to his enigmatic philosophy that was often framed in memorable aphorisms ("what a building wants to be"), unexpected juxtapositions ("silence and light"), and thought-provoking syllogisms ("science finds what is already there, but the artist makes that which is not there").⁶

Drawn to classical music, and the ruins of Classical architecture, the arc of his imagination seemed to bend of itself toward poetry. And so it seems possible that with his last design, the capital of Bangladesh, which speaks of a communal sacredness, Louis Kahn had finally found himself, on planet Earth, interwoven symbiotically with his work. Shelley commented on a similar quality found in elemental verse, a quality that also seems to emanate from Kahn's buildings:

In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry....Every original language, near to its source is itself the chaos of a cyclic poem.⁷

The thrust of Kahn's design process closely resembled this elemental writing of poetry. Kahn sought a minimal, almost primitive architectonic vocabulary that he perceived as necessary for creating an essential building mood, and rightly so. As his career and his commissions progressed, away from utilitarian building types toward monumental public spaces, the logic of that spirituality becomes clearer, and Kahn's capability to communicate it improves. One might say his buildings speak in a sort of holy verse; more evident perhaps, when experienced alone. If heightened awareness of our immediate environment provides us glimpses of four-dimensional, time-space reality, it explains why Kahn's buildings are imbued with a minimalist, existential character, not unlike Rothko's color field paintings, which have been described as 'environmental art'.

Whether Kahn was truly aware of his highly personal creative journey toward self-realization, and how it actually manifested his career, is not known. But the need to connect with an other-worldly spirituality was consistent with his life style: his isolation from intimacy; his Platonic/rabbinic teaching method; his disdain for the pragmatic; and his obsessive work habits all coincided with this type of psychic orientation. In fact, he encouraged the impression he made, as that of a guru, a cult leader, a nomad, an iconoclast.

Exactly how Kahn transmitted these inspiring poetic impressions and apprehensions is far more complex than his built environments suggest, because they emanate from his design process, more so than from any specific building components. My impression is that the architectural techniques he turned to most often were juxtaposition, (what appears to me to be his poetic syntax) and sensuality, in the literal sense of the word, (his prosody). That juxtaposition was crucial to his poetic content makes a great deal of sense, given that syntax is a modern correlate for its simpler ancestor, grammar, which was a significant defining feature of Western classical religious verse.

Any number of clearly contrasting elements can easily be recognized in Kahn's buildings, but at what level do they successfully become a unified syntactical device? Some of his highly expressive contrasts are: setting a massive masonry building in, what appears to be, the middle of a lake, (Sher-e-Bangla Nagar); a deceptively plain facade enclosing a sumptuous, complex interior environment, (Phillips-Exeter Library); and the double-juxtaposition, of dense forms (closure) contrasted with emptiness (vista), which at the same time contrasts the complexity of human activity with pure inspiration, (Salk Institute; below). And in fact, the cloister imagery at the center of the Salk Institute, with its ever-present Pacific horizon, demonstrates the efforts Kahn made in his design process to align these juxtapositions as syntax, in their rhythmic simplicity and sense of other-worldliness. His Erdman Hall dormitories, warehouse-like in form, also contain chapel-like spaces within; here Kahn invokes a severely vertical facade set against the horizontality of Bryn Mawr's pastoral campus landscape. These multifarious elements of his designs may appear dissimilar in a strictly visual context, but not necessarily as elements of a coherent poetic syntax.

The arrangement and rearrangement of...univocal terms in a series of propositions is the function of logic....The poetic has nothing to do with this. It can only manifest itself as fresh meaning...for it creates and recreates by the magic of new combinations. Horace chose his iunctura, and Maupassant his contact, well: for in the pure heat of poetic expression juxtaposition is far more important than either logic or grammar.⁸



Salk Institute, La Jolla, California

All material in nature, the mountains and the streams and the air and we, are made of Light which has been spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a shadow, and the shadow belongs to Light.⁹

Kahn's is an architectonic language of contrasts, insistent repetition and clear structural integrity, semantics that extend Classical aesthetics into modern cultural sensibilities. His use of tactile, lucid, auditory and other sensory-specific components are extremely complex; and like a first-rate poet, the prosody they create is transformed by one's personal sensibilities. Notably, his design process always emphasized the creative impulse, what architects call the conceptual design phase; however his conceptual solutions maintain their realism, always containing very logical ground for the development of each specific building program. Kahn consistently used concrete structure, which he exposed, highlighting its imposing presence; this was his central ordering device, a substantiation that complimented his elusive design orientation; similar to the ordering produced by end-of-sentence rhyming. This structural integrity found both resonance in, and developed from, using monumentality to effect, an insistence of scale Kahn incorporated in all his designs. (Regarding monumentality I should note that architectonic scale is generally underutilized, and underappreciated in modern buildings, however it has wide-ranging effect on many of the design considerations discussed here. Yet, for the purposes of these speculations, I find no poetic device that corresponds to Scale in architecture.)

Finally, in the context of poetic mood, there is a noticeable feeling surrounding Kahn's work of coming to an unexpected place. Perhaps it was, for him, an allusion to the mysterious inspiration of an ancient age. And although Kahn's work does not quite embrace an all-encompassing connection between environment and human psyche, his achievements are remarkable, all the more so for their unique contribution to modern architecture. His modern re-imagining of a thoroughly Classical poetic vision, through the contrast between cognitive immediacy and other-worldly mood, was skillfully devised using palpably authentic, yet innovative formal content. His work speaks with an aesthetic semantics of meaning, perhaps even wisdom with all its implied potential to reorient us. Owen Barfield, whose thoughts contributed so significantly to this study, wrote eloquently about a aspect of archaism resembling Kahn's work:

For properly understood, archaism chooses, not old words, but young ones. If it is objected that the meaning of archaism is here stretched too far, the reply, of course, is that it is only by such deliberate extensions that hitherto unapprehended, or unemphasized, relationships can become incarnate in meaning.¹⁰

Fumihiko Maki, 1928–Present

Fumihiko Maki was the only influential Japanese architect of his generation to study abroad, (Cranbrook and Harvard, 1952–1954). Remaining in the US, he then accepted a position as an assistant professor at Washington University, (1956). Not long afterward he returned to Tokyo and participated in the avant-garde Metabolism Group, which fused ideas about mixed-use buildings with biological principles of growth. He later returned to the US, and worked at two international style offices in New York and Boston, before forming Maki and Associates, in Tokyo, (1965), which remains active until today. From an architectural perspective his designs do reflect obvious Western aesthetic influences, however seen from the more subtle vantage of poetic-architectonic semantics, I believe Maki's designs are inherently Japanese in aesthetic origin, particularly in their development of meaning. With the exceptions of a few commissions, (that perhaps were heavily influenced by client preferences), his design process seems to consistently emphasize what I understand to be the poetic fluidity of Japanese aesthetic experience, in both intent and execution.

Maki's perceived design process also reflects another of the liminary demands of large scale modern architecture, being the necessity of employing an array of consultants, co-designers, and managers acting together in close coordination, for there to be any chance of achieving sophisticated results. The complexity of these types of large, mixed-use environments are simply beyond the capacity of one "great" individual to accomplish by himself or herself. Perceptually, Maki's architecture creates a type of poetic content that Owen Barfield also alludes to in his *Poetic Diction*. Here, I allow myself a literary inversion of Barfield's observation, one that relates directly to Maki's poetic framework. The first paragraph is Barfield's; the second, inverted one, is mine:

For example, there is a certain half-spurious element in the appreciation of poetry, with which everyone will be familiar, when one takes delight, not only in what is said, and in the way it is said, but in a sense of difficulties overcome – of an obstreperous medium having been masterfully subdued. It is a kind of architectural pleasure. One feels that the poet is working in solid masses, not in something fluid. One is reminded by one's very admiration that 'words are stubborn things'.¹¹

For example, there is a certain half-acknowledged element in the appreciation of architecture...when one takes delight, not only in form and usefulness, and in the refined manner of their execution, but in a sense of enlightening, unexpected meaning conferred. It is a kind of poetic pleasure. One feels that the architect is working in fluid aesthetic experience, not in mere 'materiality'. One appreciates, in one's evolving perceptions, 'architecture's complexity', and apprehends its potential.

How does Maki connect us directly through *cognitive experience* to that elevated sense of mastering a complex building; how does he achieve something we are also *likely* to understand innately as pleasant and poetic? First, it seems Maki infuses a general sense of fluidity, through the use of connected, referential components, which align themselves as organic flow, a qualitative effect he himself alludes to in his writings. And while Maki's buildings display excellent functionality, it is this aesthetic fluidity that draws our attention away from their pragmatic usefulness, toward the possibility of poetic dialogue with Environment. And it is a sort of dialogue: Environment speaking poetically to us, and we in turn responding in our own way. All of which is consistent with a uniquely Japanese form of poetry called Renga, a poetic comparison that, on close inspection develops considerable relatedness to Maki's work.

As I did with my exploration of Kahn's poetic-architectonic intermediality, let's look at some examples of how purposefully Maki uses building components and space to achieve these synergistic, harmonizing, and inward flowing effects. To begin with, his design process does not emphasize the conceptual design phase above all else, as in Kahn's design process. Instead, having totally embraced

the multi-disciplinary team concept of the modern architectural office, Maki's conceptual designs intentionally delegate much of their creative potential to subsequent design phases; concepts that remain open for team solutions, while establishing key referential *foci*, which guide design development. This sense of ease in Maki's buildings, reminds me of a poem by Lin Yuan:

On the road I met an old man
both our heads white as snow,
we walked one mile, then two
taking four rests, then five.¹²

And it seems likely that many of these referential elements were created by his teams in the same way that the masters of Renga poetry came together in the spirit of spontaneity and fellowship. In his firm's catalog of projects,¹³ Maki describes some of these aesthetic references: he mentions that the facade of the Spiral building references cubist art; and the exterior of the Tepia museum likewise, takes its inspiration from the de Stijl movement, while Tepia's interior perforated metal panels reference traditional Japanese shoji screens, and so on. Does the spiral ramp in the building of the same name reference the Guggenheim Museum? Most likely, while also suggesting a lovely unexpected lightness floating beyond the gravity of a lobby that could easily be mistaken for Rockefeller Center. Does the envelope layering of glass and wood panels at Penn's Annenberg Center allude to the layering of *shoji* screens and *amado* shutters in Japanese buildings? Perhaps, but whatever their interpretation, they clearly carry the intentionality and imagery that we associate with being drawn inward. At the MIT Media Lab Complex, accents of red, yellow and blue primary colors are a captivating reference to Bauhaus design, one of many. His referential relationships are so extensive that I could imagine discovering something new, something I had missed previously, with every visit. One could elaborate forever, because his method of creating allusive flow, using it as a primary design statement, gives us a discovery, one after another, of these enticing references; they catch the eye they pull you in, they make you interested in 'knowing' more, moving you through large, open spaces, until the complex character of where you find yourself comes together aesthetically, and shifts your consciousness to create new meaning.

As mentioned above, defining Maki's semantics in this way does seem a valid comparison to Renga's poetic process and format. Paraphrasing some of the notes in the poetry anthology, *From the Country of Eight Islands*: Renga is known as 'linked verse'. It is fashioned from the spontaneous interaction of two or more poets who together write alternating, short lines, which allude obliquely only to the line preceding them. This gives each series of linked verse a wide range, allowing it to flow without preconceptions. Each line follows specific syllabic rules, but with no fixed syntax, and may evolve to as many as one hundred linked lines; themes of nature are common, as are pointed references to other poetry. Here is an example from the above-mentioned anthology, written by three poets in 1491; these are lines 1 through 6:

Thinly covered with snow, the leaves look brighter along this mountain pass
the pampas grass by the boulders will be more enjoyable in winter
lured by tree crickets I left my home early
must be late at night – on my sleeves an autumn wind
dew so cold the moon seems to change its light
as you walk through unfamiliar fields.¹⁴

Of the referential mode that Maki's buildings speak with, one example stands out for me – the roof at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium; (below). Seen as a series of overlapping plates, which obscure what lies beneath their sweeping overhangs, it seems to reference the *kobuto* helmets worn by samurai fighters, who shared that same hard-core, yet vulnerable spirit found in both sports competitions and warfare. Not coincidentally, the roof's visual impact creates an apprehension of a monumental structural problem mastered skillfully. I venture to add that initially, as one approaches a

building like this, which is typical of Maki's work, one has a visceral impression of formidable design mastery; and then as one experiences its flow, spontaneity and referential fluidity – its poetic meaning – one comes away with a more considered understanding of that initial impression. Although subtle, and requiring some sense of architecture, this mode of poetic intermediality has potential for significant perceptual insight.



Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium

Maki himself readily acknowledges his reliance on referential imagery and the importance of 'flow', which I take to mean perceptual flow – flow experienced as discovery, as well as pedestrian movement. This is what I alluded to, above, as fluid aesthetic experience. Maki also clearly acknowledges his ubiquitous use of organic imagery as an integral part of the design process, and it is through this alignment between organic flow, allusive imagery and complexity that his buildings speak in subtle, yet expansive poetic modes, which when followed carefully, have the potential to expand one's consciousness further, into an even deeper, detailed layer of architectonics. Whether this approach simply emerged from Maki's own, personal sensibilities, or from skillful aesthetic deliberation, Maki fully embraces it. His chosen design semantics speak poetically of seamless relatedness, rather than of metaphor or abstraction. Perhaps most importantly, Maki's Modernist architecture benefits, in both its context and its human usefulness, from this quintessentially Japanese approach to imbuing a work of art with meaning.

Maki was, of course, largely journeying along pathways of cultural influence much like many other Japanese artists of the twentieth century, which was a period of opening up to and fusing with internationalism. Yet Maki found himself in a pivotal role, as Japan became the most successful example of modern architectural integration. This might be due in part, to Japan's ancient, abiding appreciation for building as an artform. Nonetheless, these flourishing, cross-cultural influences, borne on the wings of every modern artform during the late twentieth century, played a prominent role worldwide, as well in Maki's work. Inevitably, many of these experiments were shallow appropriations of foreign styles into other cultures, essentially the exotic fascinations of popular culture. But where these cross-cultural influences resonated deeply, a potential for new life-meanings emerged. And Maki's poetic-architectonics arguably does represent a new way of perceiving Japanese culture, as well as combining the use of fluid imagery with complexity to enhance the poetic content of modern architecture.

Reflections and Thoughts

Considering Kahn's and Maki's poetics as reflections of a broader cultural orientation, do they typify a pervasive aesthetic impulse to maintain something of a recognizably *personal* cultural semblance; of an art form still nourished by the creative roots of modernism? Not coincidentally, from

an aesthetic perspective, the twentieth century was a time of *ever-increasing pace and scale* of institutional imperatives: mass electronic media, entertainment industries, fossil-fueled travel, corporate conglomerates, all represent institutional forces with ever-increasing effects on every culture, effects which have devolved to such an extent that our sensibilities have become widely institutionalized and seriously transformed. Have some jazz musicians, architects, film makers, and modern figurative painters continued to embrace an underlying necessity of poetic expression as a sort of antidote for the proliferation of institutionalized culture? It may be that the *personal, intimate* quality of modern art, and the necessity of meaningful content, is now surviving largely through this kind of poetic intermediality.

I recall a sepia watercolor of a nineteen-twenties flapper, given to me by my grandmother, that speaks strongly of a unique “her”; of the artistic spirit who made it; and of an identifiable time and place; a small poetic image, not a portrait of what we might refer to now as a generic “twenty-something”; but rather, a uniquely personal poetic image, impressionistic, and so unlike portraiture today.

These realizations suggest the presence of a poetic continuum in modern art forms, and the importance of embracing authentic aesthetic content as an acknowledgment of the creative impulse itself. Whatever future poet-artists create, our times also beg us to consider: How disconnected have we already become from an appreciation of meaningful aesthetic content itself? Are we even aware of how impersonal most cultural artifacts are now? If poetic content imbues meaning in a work of art, and that meaningfulness connects us to our sense of self, it will continue to signify some vital part of who we are.

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Notes

¹ Indigenous architecture lies beyond the scope of this essay. However, two books I am familiar with that shed light on these types of built environments are: Sybil Moholy-Nagy. *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture*. Horizon Press NY. 1957. Bernard Rudofsky. *Architecture Without Architects*. University of New Mexico Press NM. 1987.

² Frank Lloyd Wright. *The Future of Architecture*. Horizon Press NY. 1953.

³ Another modern perspective on the language of architecture, available online, is: Olena Remizova. *The Structure of Architectural Language*. Architectural Studies. 2015. Volume 1 Number 2. p. 81–86. ISSN: 2411–801X.

⁴ Mary Kinzie. *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*. University of Chicago Press IL. 1999. p. 457.

⁵ Annie Pedret. *Within the Text of Kahn*. Master of Science in Architecture Thesis at MIT. 1993. p. 14–15. Ms Pedret's thesis defines Kahn's poetic orientation in great depth.

⁶ Stuart W. Leslie. *A Different Kind of Beauty: Scientific and Architectural Style in I.M. Pei's Mesa Laboratory and Louis Kahn's Salk Institute*. Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences 38/2. 2008. p. 201.

⁷ P.B. Shelley. *A Defense of Poetry*. Atlantic Press. 1840/2015.

⁸ Owen Barfield. *Poetic Diction*. Wesleyan University Press CT. 1937/1973. p. 131

⁹ Louis Kahn quoted by John Lobell. *Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis Kahn*. Shambhala Publications MA. 1979. p. 5.

¹⁰ Owen Barfield. p. 165.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 96. Here Barfield provides us with a prescient description of Maki's poetic context. As an architect myself, having designed large-scale, multi-use facilities similar to Maki's, I have to admit that an accurate statement of this particular aesthetic principle, and its equally insightful inverted meaning, is inspiring.

¹² Jerome P. Seaton and Dennis Mahoney. *A Drifting Boat: Chinese Zen Poetry*. White Pine Press NY. 1994. p. 83. Translated from a poem by Lin Yuan.

¹³ Fumihiko Maki: *Buildings and Projects*. Princeton Architectural Press NY. 1997.

¹⁴ Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson. *From the Country of Eight Islands*. Anchor Press NY. From Three Poets at Yuyama: Botange Shohaku; Saiokuken Socho; and Iio Sogi. 1981. p. 254.